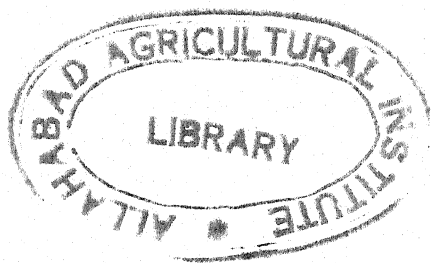


*The Resurrected Christ*



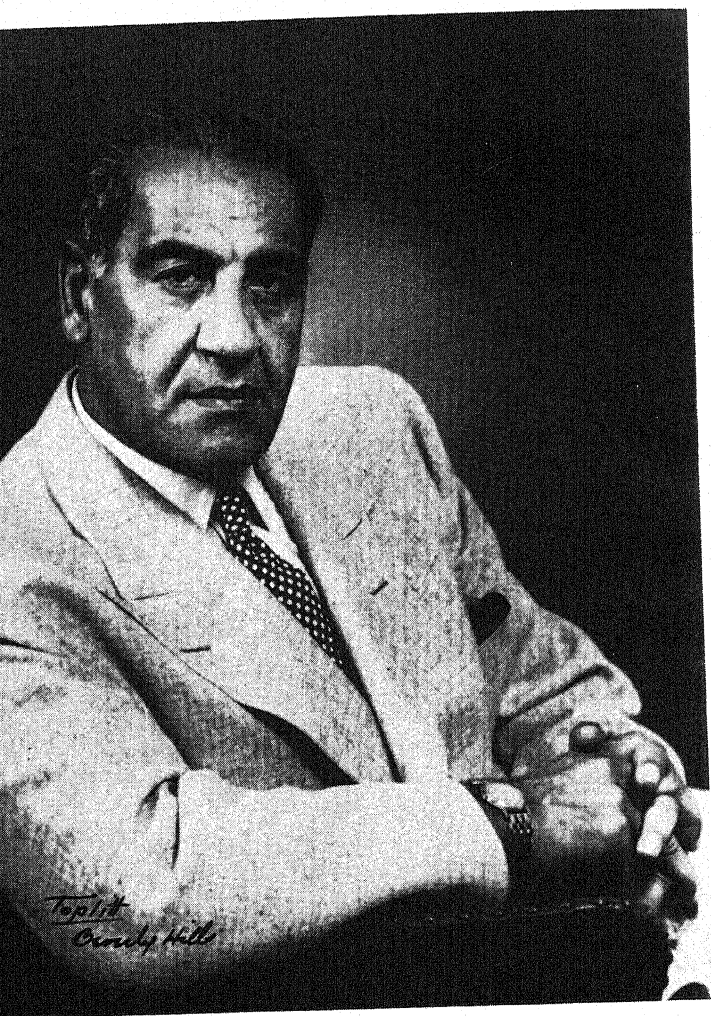
BY GOURGEN YANIKIAN

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*The Triumph of Judas Iscariot*

*Harem Cross*

*The Resurrected Christ*



GOURGEN YANIKIAN

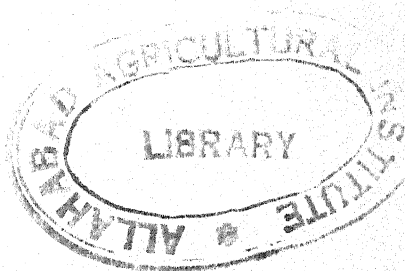
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# *The Resurrected* **CHRIST**

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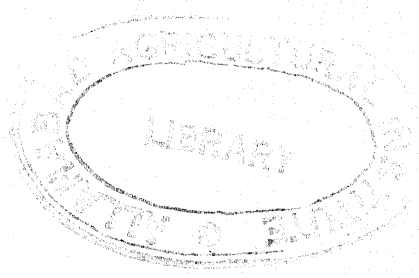
A NOVEL BY  
GOURGEN YANIKIAN



EXPOSITION PRESS • NEW YORK







## *Preface*

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JUST before the outbreak of World War II, one of the Paris newspapers reported that a group of British scientists, in the course of excavations undertaken for archaeological purposes, had succeeded in solving one of the most perplexing questions of the past twenty centuries.

At the time this report was published, because of circumstances beyond my control, I could not obtain the details of this archaeological discovery, despite my great interest in the subject. I had just undergone a major surgical operation and was confined in a hospital in Paris, hovering between life and death.

Those who took care of me during my hospitalization, among whom was my devoted wife, Dr. Shooshanig Komourdjian, herself a doctor, did everything humanly possible to help me through this crisis. With God's will and the miracle of modern medical science, I conquered death and lived to do my share of a man's job. As years rolled by, I came to feel as though Providence must have had a purpose in sparing my life.

I believe sincerely that in writing this book, in the light of the discovery of these eminent British archaeologists, I have not sinned against the will of the Almighty, nor have I transgressed His laws—only a fool would dare to reject God's existence and omnipotence. It is my deep conviction that God's laws are one and immutable, underlying all His creations. Legend, the product of ailing imagination, has no place in the divine universal order.

Reason tells me that only those motivated by selfish ends and careless of truth would seek to pervert the laws of creation and mislead their gullible fellow men by force and fiction, substituting

legend for reality. To err is human, and hence, not a sin. But to try deliberately to mislead others is sinful, and mortally so, when done in the name of God and through perversion of the universal laws.

This book is reverently dedicated to the faithful who were preyed upon by wild beasts in the arenas of Rome, to millions of innocent men and women who throughout the centuries have suffered at the hands of others innocent like themselves, and who were denied even meager blessings of life through the machinations of selfish and cruel sinners.

It is dedicated to the twentieth-century Armenian martyrs who shed their blood in their glorious devotion to the Cross, not only on their native land but also on the vast and scorching expanse of the deserts of Arabia, whose cries for help were unanswered, like the "Voice in the Wilderness," and whose executioners went unpunished in this "civilized" age of ours.

It is piously dedicated to myriads of newborn babes who, soon after seeing the light of day, were heinously murdered by creatures bearing the image of man.

It is dedicated to all who have suffered and will continue to suffer through the inhumanity of man, the tyranny, the injustice, the selfishness and the untruths of those who seek to overshadow the Divine Order with mortal error.

To those of my critics who may be inclined to condemn my work, I have this plea to make: let them be true to the voice of Reason.

GOURGEN YANIKIAN

*The Resurrected Christ*



*"It is better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness."*

CONFUCIUS

# I

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ON this day of the year 35, the last rays of the sun gleamed redly from beyond a hillock and mingled with the dark gray clouds over Jerusalem. Gradually, they were giving way to the oncoming darkness.

The streets of the city were teeming with an animated throng, just before the descending evening, but gradually they began to empty. The inhabitants hastened to their homes, where they could exchange the news of the day with their friends and family. Today, there was something important to relate.

On the hill nearest Jerusalem, two thieves and the Son of God had been sentenced by the local court to die by crucifixion. Night had not yet obscured the men on the crosses when three old Jews knocked on the door of the Roman proconsul at his house in one of the imposing streets of the city. The servant opening the door stated that his master, Pilate, was tired after his day's labors and could receive no one.

One of the callers, who in dress and manner was outstanding, then addressed the servant: "Go, tell the honorable representative from Rome that Caiaphas, the High Priest of the Jews, wishes to see him on important business."

The servant, already impressed by the imposing appearance of Caiaphas and his companions, disappeared without waiting to hear further.

In a few minutes, they heard the hurrying steps of the ser-

vant, who, even before he reached the door, loudly bade them enter in the name of his master.

In a magnificent room, lighted by many chandeliers, he whom the Roman emperor had sent hither as his personal representative awaited his visitors. He was the descendant of an aristocratic Roman family. His name was Pontius Pilate.

The servant accompanying the callers invited them to enter.

The host, smilingly welcoming Caiaphas and his companions, by a motion of his head bade the servant leave them. The door closed.

Pilate pleasantly addressed his callers.

"I am glad to see you all here, especially you, High Priest, whom I love and admire even as do your people. Sit down and be in no haste to explain your unexpected but welcome visit." He indicated a chair covered with a tiger skin to Caiaphas and seated himself opposite. Although he had tacitly included the other men in his invitation, they dared not sit but remained standing beside the chair of Caiaphas.

"You must excuse us," said Caiaphas to Pilate with a smile, "for disturbing your rest, Honorable Pilate. We beg your forgiveness. If it were not a matter that involves yourself we would not have dared . . ."

Pilate, knowing his visitor well and evaluating Caiaphas' propitiatory overtures properly, interrupted him, saying: "I am here only to serve the people who live here and who are the subjects of my emperor. In that capacity, I undertake to fulfil the weighty obligations laid upon me by the Roman board of elders. I sense that you have come with a petition."

"Yes," Caiaphas answered. "We have come with a petition, but before we present it, you must promise that you will grant it."

"I must make such a promise?" Pilate exclaimed in irked surprise. "Does not the High Priest know that every petition which does not conflict with the interests of Rome is always granted? Not twenty-four hours past, this very morning, your last request was acceded to! Did I not save from death Varvara the murderer, and, in his stead, sentence Him whom you brought to me? Is it

possible that, after all this, you must exact from me a promise to grant any request beforehand?" In censure, he added, "This is neither just nor right, esteemed Caiaphas. Therefore, before giving my word, I must know your purpose."

Thus rebuked, Caiaphas realized he had antagonized Pilate, and hastily exclaimed: "Great Pilate! Do not take offense at my words! I, as well as yourself, have the interests of Rome at heart! In your decision of this morning—a most just decision—you did serve your Emperor well, and we co-operated in it with you! In this way, have we not proved to Rome that save for its ruler we have no other king and wish for none? He whom you condemn suffered his just penalty by very reason of naming himself King of the Jews! It was my people who refused to acknowledge Him and brought Him to you—for we own but one ruler, and he, great Pilate, is your sovereign! And when he hears of this, I am certain he will be well pleased—with you and with my people—and with their spiritual leader, myself, Caiaphas!"

Aware that his words might be intentionally misconstrued, and in this wise be treacherously conveyed to hostile Roman ears, Pilate hastened to change the subject. Nodding affirmatively, he assured Caiaphas: "Truly said, High Priest, I know well that neither yourself nor your adherents have ever opposed the interests of Rome. And that is why I have always sought to meet you more than halfway and to carry out your requests. What is the reason for your visit at this time, esteemed Caiaphas?"

"We are here because tomorrow is Saturday," the High Priest answered.

"Saturday?" Pilate repeated, taken aback.

"Yes. As the Honorable Pilate well knows, this Saturday is an important day for my people. Our elders believe it unwise that the criminals, who by your just decision have been crucified, should be allowed to remain on the crosses until morning. We have come to ask you to do all in your power to hasten their end this very night, so that our Sabbath shall not be defiled. Will you order the guards stationed at the crosses to break their legs so that they may be taken away?"



Pilate, who had not been happy with the verdict he had rendered that morning, was momentarily at a loss how to respond to this new request. Quickly his mind reviewed the events of the morning, the criminals, the sentence he had passed on them, and his private, conflicting thoughts in regard to this sentence. In his capacity as the proconsul of the emperor, each word and act of his had to be rendered in the interests of Rome. For a seasoned administrator such as himself, it was not difficult to come to a decision which would at once satisfy his own conscience, his sovereign, and his present audience.

In a detached manner and calm voice, he now addressed Caiaphas and his companions. "Ah, High Priest and you esteemed fellow elders—so this is the sole reason for your visit! Of minor importance, I must say. For you could have accomplished this wish of yours independently without consulting me. The death penalty by crucifixion is mandatory for the condemned three men and must be carried out. If, for some valid reason, such as that tomorrow is the Sabbath," he added with masked irony, "this execution must be hastened, it is contrary neither to the decree nor to the law of the land. This morning, I rendered my verdict: death on the cross. If, by reason of the religious principles of your people, it is essential that the criminals' tie with life be cut short, I have no objection. You, respected High Priest, and your elders have proclaimed the decree of death. In the same way, you can now dispose of this matter with your own soldiery, and, truth to tell, had you already done so, it would be a matter of indifference to me. I understand, of course, that your present request is based on your desire not to disrupt the tranquillity of your people, not to break into their holy day. I can only convey my admiration of your zeal, and your righteous solicitude for the observance of your holy laws. Go, and do just as you wish in the matter."

With these words, Pilate arose, thus indicating that the audience was terminated.

Caiaphas, by this time well aware of Pilate's evasions and acute circumlocutions, recognized that the responsibility for what

would follow had thus been transferred to him. Rising, he extended both hands to Pilate in ostensible gratitude. Turning to his companions with a false smile, he told them: "You see—I was sure that our request would be granted. What solicitude the esteemed Roman emissary shows us! Let us go and issue instructions to our soldiers."

Long after they had left, Pilate restlessly and nervously paced the long chamber. His face was a study in emotions. Caiaphas' call invoked in his mind the thoughts that had occupied it that morning, when he was rendering his decision. In his heart he was not sure his decision had been just. He had tried to reach a verdict satisfactory to his sense of probity, but such a verdict would have been contrary to his position and his responsibility as emissary of Rome. As such, how could he not have accepted as valid the testimony of the leaders of a people in regard to one who himself belonged to that people? Had he the right to defend a man, when by so doing he would arouse a whole nation against himself? It was a ponderable question, especially if one should examine the basis of the accusations against that man. Men in high places, the religious leaders of a people, had brought to him a person, and had testified that this man was representing himself as their king. What consequences might this not have had, if news of it had reached Rome?

Absorbed in these thoughts, Pilate gazed at the lustrous chandeliers and did not notice a servant who had entered the room and who was now bowing low before him. Not before he was about to leave the room did he turn to the man; his train of thought broken, he looked at the servant questioningly.

The servant again bowed low, and said: "Master, Joseph of Arimathaea has long been waiting an audience with you."

Pilate knew Joseph well as a prominent, wealthy man in the community. With a nod, he bade the servant to admit him.

Joseph's arrival did not surprise Pilate; this was not the first time he had called on him. At times, his visits were lengthy. Being well acquainted with the land and its mixed population, he

was a welcome companion for Pilate. Pilate had himself invited Joseph several times when he wished enlightenment on a local matter. His coming today gladdened Pilate, for he was satisfied, if only for a time, to be relieved of the troublesome thoughts which had accumulated in his mind through the day.

Joseph entered. Taking his hand in sincere welcome, Pilate led him to the chair recently occupied by the High Priest. Noticing Joseph's pallor and distraught movements, Pilate asked: "What has happened, Joseph? Why art thou so strange today, so pale?"

Joseph, whom these words appeared to disturb still more, in answer asked only for a glass of water.

There was a few minutes' silence, awkward to both men. Wishing to terminate it, Pilate repeated his question.

Joseph, gazing at Pilate, in turn asked: "Tell me, dear Pontius, dost thou consider me a loyal friend?"

"Yes," the other replied. "Dost thou doubt it?"

"Not that," Joseph returned. "But may I, as well, think of thee as one of my best friends?"

Surprised at this turn of the conversation Pilate rose, and looking at Joseph said: "Listen, Joseph. Up to this time, I do not believe thou hast had occasion to doubt my loyalty. What is troubling thee and why thy strange question?"

Joseph, who was becoming increasingly agitated, rose and approached Pilate. "Dear Pontius, if I should ask thee to do something for me—"

This abrupt approach gave Pilate pause. Immediately he recollected his recent conversation with Caiaphas. To break the tension, Pilate gravely asked Joseph: "Thou wantest . . . what?"

"A small thing only, my dear Pontius—if, of course, thou wilt help me—He who was crucified has already surrendered His soul. Permit me to take possession of His body . . . to bury Him."

These words of Joseph disturbed Pilate, by bringing back to his mind the morning's events. He did not even ask whom Joseph meant. He knew. Controlling himself, Pilate asked quietly, as if indifferently, "Is it possible that He is dead already?"

"Yes," Joseph exclaimed. Absorbed in his thoughts, for some minutes Pilate gazed at his friend. During this time, many things passed through his mind. What they were, Joseph could not determine. He looked on as Pilate swiftly went to the door and issued orders to bring to him at once the leader of the local guard. Then, turning to Joseph, he motioned him to a chair and began to stride about the room.

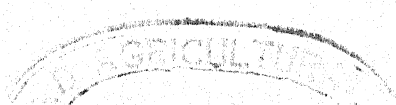
Joseph was at a loss to understand what was going on. His eyes followed Pilate in his pacing. Long minutes passed. Then a servant ushered in the leader of the guard, who extended his arm toward Pilate in greeting and stood before him inquiringly. Then Pilate asked: "How far has the execution of the three crucified criminals progressed?"

Again extending his arm in salute, the guard began to report loudly. "In accordance with your orders, the crucifixion took place as scheduled. Owing to a multitude of spectators, I was forced to leave a guard about the men. One of these, on the cross in the center of which an inscribed board was affixed, according to your orders, died very shortly. Half an hour ago, some Jewish soldiers came. They had instructions to hasten the death of the crucified men. Finding that only two of these were still alive, they carried out these instructions. Darkness was approaching and, as the spectacle seemed to be ending, the spectators began to disperse. A few who remained near the guard were ordered to leave also. Several minutes ago, as there was no further need of the guard, I ordered them to return to barracks."

"Well done," Pilate replied. "I am satisfied with your work. You may leave."

Joseph, who had been listening to all this, now awaited Pilate's decision impatiently. After the guard had left, closing the door behind him, Pilate approached Joseph. He looked into his eyes for a long time, then quietly said: "Go. Take Him. Bury Him as thou wishest. Try not to attract attention, but if necessary thou mayst say that thou hast my authority."

Gratefully, Joseph seized Pilate's hands in his own, and press-



ing them, exclaimed: "Noble Pontius! I will never forget this deed of thine!" Hastily, he made ready to leave. At the door, he heard Pilate's voice and turned.

"Do not ascribe this to our friendship only," said Pilate. "I have other reasons. However, those will remain with me."

And now Pilate was left alone with his confused and tempestuous thoughts.

## II

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ON leaving Pilate's house, Joseph quickly passed through the streets into the narrow alleys of eastern Jerusalem. This part of town contained many small inns catering to the inhabitants and to travelers. Joseph was aware of the identity of the houses with flat roofs which adjoined each other in this quarter. His pace did not slacken as he heard laughter and obscene calls come from open windows. He hastened into the house where he was awaited. This house was in no way dissimilar from the dozens of others he had passed. However, he did not come here for recreation, but rather to console one whose suffering was greater than his own. He wanted to tell her as quickly as possible the outcome of his conversation with Pilate. Mary Magdalen was staying here, having found refuge in this house after the arrest of Jesus.

This was not the first time Mary had lived here. She had been brought up in this house since childhood, having been adopted by its owners. This couple, at Mary's maturity, had enrolled her among the subservient women who lived here in order to give men pleasure, and here she had led a life full of warm merriment. Here she was initiated into the conduct of the light women who were her companions, following the pattern of their life. She had early discovered and appreciated the value of money. In these ways she had lived until accidentally she met the persons who were the cause of her leaving this house and becoming the follower of Jesus.

Following Jesus' arrest, she, like the others of His followers, dispersed throughout the city; she had returned to this house and to her adopted parents. Though they had been offended by her desertion, they now took pity on her and readmitted her. In their mind was the hope that she would resume the former calling which had been of such pecuniary advantage to them. On the apprehension of Jesus, knowing Joseph to be the Master's follower, she hurried to him. On her knees she begged him, as an influential citizen, to be instrumental in liberating Jesus from the hands of His enemies. She called the Master "my Jesus," and Joseph became aware of the great love she nurtured for Him.

Joseph, too, revered and loved the Nazarene. However, he concealed this, for it might have led to his destruction by the authorities opposed to Jesus and His teachings. But Mary's prayers and tears, together with his own secret tumult, made him decide to go to the aid of Jesus. He could not act openly, being a member of the board of elders prosecuting Christ. By devious ways, he tried to influence the elders, but to no avail. Although he had promised the Magdalen to save Jesus, he had been unable to do so. Jesus, as the self-elected King of the Jews, had borne his death penalty, and Joseph had been constrained to suffer this in silence. He now felt guilty toward Mary, because he had been powerless to save the Teacher. After Jesus' death, he was impelled to do whatever he could, not only to atone to Mary but also, urged even as were countless others, to sanctify the teachings of the Son of God. That is why he had gone to his friend, Pontius Pilate, to obtain his consent for the burial of Jesus. Now, the Magdalen must know what he had accomplished.

Hardly had he entered the house when Mary appeared, seized him by the arm, and quickly led him to a secluded room. She locked the door.

Joseph stared at Mary. She was almost unrecognizable. Her disheveled hair, the eyes puffed from lack of sleep, and her look of weariness and exhaustion detracted from the beauty which had formerly captivated all. He was loath to tell her of Jesus' death on the cross. But very shortly he discovered that Mary knew of

this catastrophe, and to this extent he was relieved of his task. He now told her of his conversation with Pilate, and that he was empowered to remove Jesus from the cross and to bury Him as he thought best.

Mary wished to accompany him to the burial, but Joseph refused. He thought it best to take as few people with him as possible in order not to attract attention. He needed one physically able to help him in this weighty undertaking. He already had a plan. Nicodemus, another secret follower of Jesus, would come to help Joseph by lending his superior strength. Joseph had no doubt of Nicodemus' willingness. As for Mary's wish, he tried to persuade her that it was dangerous to go with him. She continued to protest, and after protracted arguments during which Joseph saw he could not dissuade her, he said: "Listen, Mary. If you insist on going with me, I shall not avail myself of Pilate's permission at all."

"What!" Mary exclaimed. "You will not go to lift my Jesus from the cross? You will not pay your debt to your sacred Master?"

Offended by these words, Joseph interrupted the woman: "You are right. He was to me far more than Teacher. And you forget that He was such not only to myself. But where are His best pupils, those who were inspired by Him and in His name performed miracles? Why have they scattered like the dust? The finest of them, Peter, at our Master's trial, gazed into His eyes and denied Him. Another, in whom our Teacher had such confidence as to entrust to him the treasury, treacherously betrayed Him. While I, His secret follower, am willing to forfeit my public standing and to fling caution to the winds in order to be true to His memory. This you do not seem to appreciate. Far better would it have been, Mary, if all that you have told me you had told to His disciples. I have come here only to console you, knowing your love for Him, and to tell you the glad news that He shall not remain nailed to the cross but shall be properly interred according to the laws of the land.

"It is I," he added, "abandoning all thought for my own



safety, who have decided upon this. The rays of the rising sun shall not fall on Him amid the thieves! If, after all I tell you here, you, one of those closest to Him, still refuse to appreciate this, there is nothing more I can say to you. I shall now leave you and go to do that which my inner voice bids me. If ever you need my help, do not hesitate to come to me. At the behest of my conscience, you shall have any aid you need."

Without awaiting answer from Mary, Joseph went quickly to the door and left the house. Soon he disappeared into the thickening darkness of the night. Behind him, the loud weeping of the Magdalen coursed to the street.

But before long, her tears ceased. She came to understand that in his own interests Joseph could not countenance her presence at the funeral. He told her so frankly. But how could she remain at home, while her Master was being taken from the cross to His grave? The great love she bore for Him made this seem unendurable.

She came to a decision. Quickly wrapping a black shawl around her, she left the house as the moon was rising.

### III

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MEANWHILE, Joseph was directing his steps toward the center of town, where his friend Nicodemus lived. Nicodemus, like Joseph, was one of the wealthy gentry, but Joseph had seen him several times in the late evening, leaving the lodgings of Jesus. At first, his confidence in Nicodemus was uncertain, but a conversation on a later occasion confirmed his belief in Nicodemus' loyalty. Although sharing this loyalty and their devotion to the Master, they were also united in common concealment of this from their fellow citizens. Joseph felt assured that Nicodemus was the only man who would gladly help him now, and that from him he did not need to conceal the results of his visit to Pontius Pilate. Nicodemus would be as one with him in this mission.

He approached a large, luxurious house in one of the residential streets, knocked and was admitted.

After a few minutes, the door of the house opened again and two shadowy forms emerged, carrying some parcels, and made their way to the outskirts of the town. Although they had no special cause to be afraid, yet they traversed the darker streets. The destination of Joseph and Nicodemus was the hillock outside of town, on which that morning the crucifixion had taken place. They spoke in low voices and, thus absorbed in conversation, did not notice at some distance behind them two darkly cloaked forms. Mary Magdalen and Mary Joseph also were bound in the same direction.

The Magdalen had felt assured that Mary Joseph, a follower of Jesus, would wish to participate. After Joseph had left her, unhesitatingly she had gone to the other woman and told her the news. Mary Joseph agreed to accompany her on the condition that they would watch from afar, in order not to make their presence known to Joseph. The Magdalen assented. They set out, trying to make themselves inconspicuous. Not wishing to be noticed even by the passers-by, several times they darted into dark niches and doorways. On such a troubled day, and at this late hour, women should not be alone on the streets. But each step brought the two Marys nearer to their crucified Master. Their intense recognition of this constantly brought tears to their eyes.

As the town was left behind, they became less cautious. Beating their breasts and stifling their sobs, the two women stumbled, fell, and rose again to pursue their way toward the crucified Beloved. Each knew of the other's love, but on this occasion all differences provoked by this love and by their mutual dislike and envy were conciliated. Since He had left the living, He could show no partiality toward either woman.

As they neared the hillock, the moon emerged from the clouds and spread its yellow glow over the landscape. Beyond the site of the crucifixion rose the slopes with their olive groves. Mary Joseph urged the Magdalen toward the trees. Here, concealed in the shadows, they gazed down at the plateau with its three crosses. Tensely, they peered out at Him whose lifeless head inclined unseeingly downward. The moonlight touched His face tenderly and evoked intense emotions in the women—love, and pity, and a horror that made their flesh crawl as their eyes rested on the limp body. They tried to suppress their weeping. It was that moment of great disaster which submerges the tension between two antagonists and sends them into each other's arms for consolation. Their faces were pressed close together, their tears mingled and fell to the ground. This was not Mary Joseph weeping, nor Mary Magdalen. It was Woman, crazed with love, mourning over her irrevocable loss.

Stricken as they were, the two women did not notice the

other obscure figures who, kneeling at the base of the center cross, were digging in the ground. Joseph and Nicodemus were losing no time. After looking about cautiously, they had neared the cross, on which Jesus had been nailed, to begin their task. They had taken counsel and had decided to uproot the cross carefully and to level it to the ground. Then they had planned to detach the body of the Saviour. With them they had brought shrouds and, according to Jewish ritual, oil for anointing the body. But they had not realized that they should have brought certain implements to facilitate their work, and time being short, they did not wish to return to town. They could use stones for digging out the cross, and this they did laboriously but effectively. Their hands bled into the upflung earth. Finally, they reached the base of the cross and moved it to and fro to free it of the surrounding soil. Then, Nicodemus drew the cross gently to himself, while Joseph cautiously inclined the board. Another minute or two and the weight of the cross rested on Nicodemus. Strenuously, both men tugged at it until it leveled out and reposed on the ground. They were face to face with their King. His head was dampened with the perspiration born of their toil.

Now, they began to loosen the spikes, working tediously about the wounds of the Saviour so as not to aggravate them. After the nails were extracted, they spread the shrouds on the ground and lifted Him onto them. They mixed the ointments of myrrh and aloe and anointed His entire body, covering His wounds with this healing salve. They had little to say during their labors. When they had finished, Nicodemus took another winding sheet, fragrantly scented, and with it they covered Him entirely. And now they spoke in whispers as if loath to disturb Him as He slept before them.

"Joseph," Nicodemus asked, "is there aught else to do according to the funeral ritual?"

"I do not know," the other replied. "I have never done this before. It is well that you have thought to bring the shrouds and the ointments. If we have erred against tradition, we will be forgiven. What matters now, Nicodemus, is, where shall we bury Him?"

Nicodemus thought a moment. "In yonder garden, beneath a rock, there is a sepulchre. We can deposit the body in it until the Sabbath has passed. Then, we shall confer with our friends and decide where to hold the burial."

Lifting the shrouded body, they went toward the garden. Here, huddled together under the trees, sat Mary Joseph and Mary Magdalen. The men passed by them, not twenty paces away. Magdalen wished to call to them, but the other woman laid her hand over her lips and whispered to her: "Be silent, or you will bring us both to grief. Remember what you promised. Think of the consequences. Leave them to their task."

Nearing the sepulchre in the garden, in which they planned to place Jesus, Joseph and Nicodemus were forced to bend over to enter through the low opening of the grotto. The women saw all this clearly. Presently the two men emerged empty-handed. Each took a boulder near by, and with these they sealed the entrance to the grotto.

Their sacrificial labors were at an end. With one last look back, Nicodemus turned to Joseph. "I had been tormented that I was unable to come to the aid of our Teacher. I am most grateful that you have sought me out. Now, my conscience is at rest."

"It is I who must thank you," Joseph replied. "Had you not joined me in this, I could not have done it single-handed."

And thus assuaging each other, the two secret disciples of Jesus returned to the city. Passing the plateau with the two thieves on the cross, they glanced up at them. "God be praised," Joseph said, looking heavenward, "that His Son is no longer in the ranks of these."

Hardly had the men passed from the scene than Mary Joseph almost forcibly persuaded the Magdalen to leave with her, for the latter in turn tried to get Mary Joseph to accompany her to the sepulchre. After some time, Mary Joseph, to terminate the dispute, announced that she would return to town alone and proclaim the whereabouts of the Magdalen. Mary Magdalen's reaction, on hearing this, was not perceptible to Mary Joseph, but in the darkness she felt the other yielding to walk by her side. Thus the two women retraced their steps to the city of Jerusalem.

## IV

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IT was after midnight when the two Marys reached the house where the Magdalen had found temporary refuge. Mary Joseph did not remain there long. After a few minutes' conversation with Mary Magdalen's hosts, who had been awaiting them in impatience, and promising to return in the morning, she left.

The Magdalen did not answer the questions flung at her by her foster parents. She went upstairs to a room where she would not be disturbed, and closed the door. She wept no more, but looked about her with deadened eyes. The night was not warm, but she appeared to suffocate. With parted lips, she breathed with difficulty. She opened the window, but the cool air brought no relief. Neither did she seek rest on her bed. Notwithstanding the long distance she had covered, she felt no physical fatigue; her suffering was of the soul alone. Again, she saw before her eyes what had just transpired in Golgotha. As if staring into the distance, she thought she saw His fallen head raise itself, and His eyes look into hers. And now on His countenance the Magdalen clearly saw a light smile. His lips were moving. Not only did she see this, but she heard Him pronounce her name.

He was calling her, her fevered imagination told her. She fled from the room, as if maddened.

Day was breaking. Uncloaked, Mary Magdalen ran through the deserted streets of the city. The very air, with its early morning freshness, hovered about her disheveled hair and seemed to whisper in His voice, "Mary, Mary . . ."

The hillock came into sight. Then the olive grove . . . the trees from among which she had gazed toward the grotto. Mary did not hesitate for long. With her lips she meant to heal His wounds from His crown of thorns.

The sun rose. Oblivious to everything, the Magdalen quickly approached the grotto and its entrance. It was unobstructed, and in her present state of mind she failed to recall that Joseph and Nicodemus had blocked it with rocks. She entered. A harsh shriek broke from her, one of disappointment, astonishment, and alarm. Terrorized, the woman returned to the entrance and looked about her, crazed. She tore at her lips in frenzy. Insane cries broke from her, intermingled repeatedly by one phrase: "Where is He? . . . Where is my Jesus?"

She re-entered the grotto, and again tore out into the open from it, rushing about frantically in her search and calling His name. She was at the end of her strength. Her voice dwindled to a whisper, and only the movement of her lips revealed the name of Him whom she was seeking. Her distraught mind could not encompass what had happened. She sought no explanation of it. She knew only that they had crucified her beloved Jesus, that on the cross He had died. It was here that with her own eyes she had watched Him being entombed by His friends—and now He was no longer here! Where was the Saviour?

Suddenly another thought struck her with horror. Could it be that His enemies had again crucified Him? Almost out of her mind, Mary ran to the plateau.

The morning sun was shining warmly. The two crucified thieves on their crosses had long since departed this life. Down their thighs the blood had trickled from their wounds. The mortal bodies of the thieves appeared unnaturally elongated. Between them on the ground lay the third crucifix, shorn of its hallowed burden. And now approaching, the Magdalen saw that He whom she sought was not there. Kneeling, she began to kiss the cross on which He had given His life and forfeited her deathless love for Him. She kissed the spot where His head had rested, the holes where spikes had been driven through His arms and legs. Passion-

ately she embraced the cross, pressing to her breast this inanimate and innocent instrument of His doom. From the warmth of her embrace, the bloodstains on the cross fluidized and suffused Mary's lips and cheeks; she was not conscious of this blood, gulping it down with her tears. Insensibly, she took unto herself the blood of Him for whom she had been ready to lay down her life, and for whose salvation she would have given her own blood.

A noise above her now distracted her. Lifting her head, she sprang up. Over her, vultures were circling, wings flailing the tranquil air. In two groups they hovered over the thieves on the cross. Horrified, Mary watched them narrow down to their objectives. Then, one of them alighted and thrust his bloodthirsty beak into the face of the corpse. She screamed as if struck, closed her eyes, and whirling about began to run toward the city. It seemed to her that the crucifixes were following her and she spurred herself on. She heard the cries, "Mary! Mary, return! Stop!" but these had the effect only of urging her to faster flight. Had she been in her right mind, she would have understood that this was not her imagination—that someone was really calling to her. As she ran, her mind visualized what would have happened, had the friends of the Saviour not retrieved Him from the cross. Not only had He been persecuted in life, but in death He would have been also torn by vultures, limb from limb.

Mary tried to reach the outskirts of town, because here she knew of a house wherein the disciples of Christ were hidden. She wished to tell them of what had happened. The elements seemed to favor her, this woman who had undergone such physical and emotional strain. And this was understandable—for a woman in love finds an ally in Nature, and Mary's exhaustion was tempered by the passion which flamed in her, and from which new life coursed in her veins, all directed toward the accomplishment of her present goal.

At last she reached the house. She knew these narrow alleys well, since she had often traversed them with her Teacher. The house was on the corner. Nervously, she rapped on the door. The owner of the house shortly opened the door to her, and on



seeing Mary, gave an exclamation of surprise. Mary had hardly entered when, before uttering a word, she fell to the floor helplessly. The other woman, taking cognizance of the Magdalen's disheveled state and the traces of blood on her face, assumed she had met with an accident. She turned to the inner chambers and called loudly for help.

Several men and women now ran out to them, and seeing the collapsed Magdalen, lifted her gently and carried her into a bed chamber. When they laid her down she was still unconscious. They bathed her face, trying vainly to find the wounds that had caused the bleeding. This revived her. Opening her eyes she recalled everything and began to weep loudly. At the same time, and rather incoherently, she began to tell her tale. It was difficult to understand her.

Now, among those present were Peter and another favorite pupil whom Jesus loved more than any other. From Mary's confused speech they gathered that her story had to do with their beloved Teacher. Peter silenced Mary and instructed her to speak more calmly so that they might understand. The others seconded Peter's words. Gradually, Mary started to relate in proper order all that had transpired since before the dawn. Those surrounding her listened, then looked at each other in amazement. Peter voiced the opinion that Mary had lost her mind and that her story was a fantastic concoction.

On hearing this, Mary collected herself further and again told her story more coherently from the beginning. Her listeners, now impressed, were astounded. For had they not seen with their own eyes how their Master met His death upon the cross? And Joseph had told them how with Pilate's permission he had taken Jesus from the cross and deposited him in a secret sepulchre. To this, which they had already known, Mary was now adding that Jesus was not to be found at this time in the sepulchre wherein Joseph and Nicodemus had placed Him.

"How could that be?" asked the surprised Peter. "You made no mistake about the place?"

"I made no mistake," she answered. "He is not there. Come with me and I shall show you where He was."

Those present began to persuade Peter to go personally so that he could bear testimony. This Peter seemed loath to do, because he had no faith in Mary's words.

Knowing this, Mary turned to the other pupil of Jesus and dispassionately said, "Even though Peter does not believe me, you at least, whom my Jesus loved above all others, must have faith that I am speaking the truth. If you, too, do not believe me, come and I shall show you the very spot. You could not forget so soon His feeling for you. Do you not want the truth? Come with me!"

And with these words Mary rose from the bed and made her way to the door. Her speech and her readiness to offer proof had their effect on the pupils of Jesus.

And now Peter, turning to the other pupil, said: "Yes, let us go. Her story is amazing and incredible—still, let us go."

As the two disciples accompanied Mary to the street, those remaining behind began to exchange impressions. The tale they had just heard was to them but a figment of her imagination.

## V

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THE foes of Jesus had accomplished their aim. At their insistence He was condemned to death and nailed to the cross of Golgotha between the two thieves. Among His enemies were those who, while they did not believe Him to be the Messiah, still demanded of Him proof that He was not of mortal men. And even when He was on the cross, they gave Him no peace. Jesus heard some of them request Him to descend from the cross in order to prove to them that He was in truth the chosen Son of God.

Vain were His prayers for help. He had been condemned by men and had received no assistance whatever from His Father. And on the cross, weakening in His agony, He had reproached His Father for forsaking Him. Gradually His reason waned, and He was conscious of this. He knew that it was futile to hope for deliverance. He was tortured by thirst. With His ebbing strength He begged for water. But in its stead there was given to Him vinegar to moisten His lips. Jesus felt darkness coming on Him. His reason was weakening. He was aware that He was doomed. His head began to droop. For the last time, scarcely moving His lips, His dimmed and wearied eyes casting a last glance about Him, He whispered: "It is finished." Then, His head fell forward on His breast.

Day passed into night. A gleam of consciousness came into the darkened reason of Christ, and following it, gradually came

awareness and thought. It took Him only a few seconds to realize what had transpired. He recalled only what had led up to the crucifixion. Now He had come to, in what darkness He knew not, His entire body enveloped in shrouds. This might be a dream, He thought. He made a movement to free himself of His envelopings. But severe pains in His arms and legs convinced Him He was not dreaming. With further considerable effort, He freed Himself of His wrappings, and found His entire body fragrantly anointed. This did not surprise Him, but only convinced Him of the reality of the present. He well knew that the ritual of His people called for this custom with the deceased, and He did not doubt that He had been subjected to it. Recalling His torture, His mind dwelt on the moment when instead of water He had been proffered vinegar. His memory held nothing more. Coming to consciousness in this darkness, he knew not what time had elapsed nor where He now found Himself. His hands, groping about Him, touched the cold stones, and He shuddered. There must be, He thought, a way out from this unfamiliar enclosure.

In the darkness, He continued to grope about Him. He thought of nothing except escape. For Jesus now knew full well what must have occurred. They had taken Him for dead on the cross, funeral services had been held for Him, and His body had been surrendered to the sepulchre. This nightmarish realization caused Him to forget His wounds. With renewed effort, He sought the exit He was certain must be near by. He feared only that this exit might be sealed. The sepulchre was not large, so that it was not long before He found the rocks blocking the entrance. With all His strength, He now sought to move those rocks. He succeeded. The way was clear.

Jesus left the sepulchre. He saw that night had fallen. Wrapping His shroud around Him, He went further into this Garden of Gethsemane and decided to rest in a secluded corner. Then, too, He must take time to think. He did not dwell on the past; it was the future which interested Him. He was absorbed in His thoughts of what step He should next take.

AGRICULTURE

Hours passed. Now Jesus heard cries issuing from the direction from which He had come. He heard His name called. There was no doubt—they were searching for Him. A woman's voice came to Him, but of her identity He was not sure. He rose and quickly went toward the voice. After a few paces He stopped, as if to anticipate what was happening. Maybe others were with the woman. Maybe He would walk into danger. All this passed through His mind.

On the other hand, He must know what was going on. The cries in His name came again and again. Jesus decided not to expose Himself until He knew who was calling Him. Trying to be inconspicuous, He moved forward slowly. It was already dawn and He had to take care not to be seen.

When He had retraced His steps to some extent, He saw a woman whom He immediately recognized. Mary Magdalen was running toward the crosses.

Jesus' thoughts took another turn. Hope arose in Him that things could be arranged in accordance with His wishes. He hastened His pace toward the woman, but His wounds retarded Him. Reaching a rock from which He could view the plateau, He saw that Mary was now hurrying toward the city. Abandoning all caution and ignoring His pain, He began to run after her. But the distance between them increased and He realized that He could not overtake her. His weakened voice, issuing from His tortured body, in turn began to call her. He called her name, implored her to return, but all in vain. When at last she disappeared from His sight, He sank exhausted onto the ground.

Before this He had paid no attention to the crosses with the crucified bodies of the thieves, for He had been watching the opposite direction taken by the woman. Now, He began to look around and saw them. His memory again evoked the image of His crucifixion. And now, with all these tangible things before Him, He recalled almost entirely what had happened to Him before the crucifixion. Jesus understood that—for friend and foe alike—He was now dead. Thus far, it was only for Himself that He was alive. Was it needful, He thought, gazing at the thieves

on the crosses, that He should be alive for others as well? He understood from Mary's haste to return to town what speculation His disappearance would arouse. She would tell others, and most likely would return here with them.

Jesus had not yet formulated any plans for His future, nor what identity He should assume after this, His resurrection. There was no doubt that He would be sought out. What should He do meanwhile—avoid them and conceal Himself, or present Himself to them? It was morning now. He rose and retraced his steps to His former hiding place. He had come to no final decision. Recalling His last minutes on the cross, He began to accuse Himself of deficient will power. Flushing, He recollected the words He had directed to His Father. He saw now that He had erred. He fell to His knees in ardent silent prayer. He besought the Almighty to forgive Him the accusing words He had spoken in His last minutes on the cross. He owned that He had been mistaken in rejecting the power and glory of the Lord. The Almighty had not forsaken Him, but had saved Him from extinction. "If Thou seest me here on my knees, Lord," Christ prayed, "it is because I know not how other to express to Thee my joy and gratitude. Thou hast saved me from death in a way chosen by Thee. I am guilty of doubting Thee and I beseech Thee, Almighty Father, to give me strength and the power to follow the path Thou hast selected for me. Enlighten me by the radiance of Thy mercy, so that I may find this path. Thy powerful will has resurrected me. It is Thou who must open to me the portals of my new life!"

Jesus thoroughly understood His position. He tried to find a way out which would safeguard Him in the future and which at the same time would not compromise His past work. For what might not happen if His enemies were to discover that He had not died on the cross! What fresh measures would they take? Perhaps they would insist on the punishment decreed for Him—would demand a repetition of His crucifixion and in such a manner that this time His penalty would surely be fatal. Or perhaps, should He cease His proselytizing, at best they would let Him be.

What effect would this have then? What would be accomplished by His abstaining from His labors? Such questions preoccupied Jesus, for He knew well that His time to come to a decision was limited. And on the solutions to these questions rested the pattern of His future existence.

Before His eyes, He saw vividly the thorny way He had come. He had overcome all obstacles and had almost achieved the objective for which He labored. For years past, with His disciples and followers, He had traversed the land, had taught and preached. He had convinced His believers, who had accepted Him as the proclaimed Jehovah, Messiah of the Jewish people. If what really had happened came to light, what would become of them? Would He remain immortal in their eyes? For His immortality was not of His own making, but had been made possible by those of His friends who had given their lives for it. Had He the right, for His own sake alone, to conceal and destroy that which did not belong only to Himself? Now that He had escaped death by the will of the Almighty, would His Father condone abandonment of His preachments? Such were the pressing and complicated problems passing through the mind of Jesus, impelling Him toward their solution. He well knew the consequences, should His will weaken in this decision. He must face these problems alone, for they who could have helped Him were no longer among the living.

As if trying to banish the bitter thoughts in His mind, the lips of Jesus moved: "No, No! This cannot be, and shall not be! To face the destruction of our aspirations, to hear the derisive words of the crowd, and to see their mocking faces, to be the cause of the frustration of thousands of believers—no, all this is beyond me! How can I continue to dwell among them when every step I take will evoke the memory of my former greatness? Would the voices of my friends, yea, even from the cold depths of their graves, let my conscience rest in peace? No, this too shall not pass! I cannot and should not stop midway to our goal! I shall continue, relying on the help of my Almighty Father. I have been tortured on the cross—and there I have died. All know this, and

so be it. My death shall be instrumental in continuing to pursue that life for which I was chosen!"

After making this final decision as to His future course, Jesus now contemplated the measures He should take to accomplish it.

It was now long since the Magdalen had left the scene of the crucifixion. Jesus was certain that she would return, either alone or with others. He looked for a spot near the entrance to the sepulchre from which He could watch and not be seen. His plans hinged on the outcome of this visit. Now that by the grace of God He had regained His life, it were well to turn to account that for which He had suffered. Let friend and foe alike rest assured that Jesus, the divine-sent Messiah, had here shed His blood and given up His life. Should He appear among them once more, it would have to be in a different guise. His death must yet again confirm all He had taught and promised them. For His whole life and actions had conformed to the teachings of the Prophets as written in the Holy Book. If at this time He should not bear out their prophecies of the Messiah, the words of the Holy Book would be as naught, the augurs would be under the shadow of doubt, and His identity would emerge ambiguous and obscure! No—He must pursue the path chosen for Him by the Prophets.

It was difficult for Jesus to continue in His predestined role as the Messiah, for those whose will and vigor had given Him courage had passed on.

The Nazarene had rightly assumed that Mary would return. He now saw her approaching, accompanied by two others; and once they came near, He recognized them. He was glad she had come, but at the same time a discontent filled Him at the sight of Peter by her side. How could Peter be of help to Him in His new life when he possessed neither will power nor any definite goal? When Jesus had stood before the tribunal, and the sentence on Him had not yet been announced, was it not Peter who, with his eyes shamelessly looking into those of his Teacher, had denied Him? And so, how could Peter aid Him in this life which was



now beginning for Him, and which would be even more difficult than His preceding one? Jesus knew that only those could be of assistance to Him whose ideological fanaticism would make them stop at nothing. People were needed who would die rather than be false to their spirit. And now, among those nearing the sepulchre, was there one whom He could trust?

True, He knew of the infinite love Mary bore for Him. Had He not seen her at His grave that morning? But He did not know the true reason for her visit.

The three approached the sepulchre. Peter and the other disciple entered, then emerged, with their faces and hands expressing astonishment. Mary, seated on a boulder outside, was quietly weeping. And now the disciples went toward the plateau, but when they had come to the scene of the crucifixion, they turned back in evasion of painful memories. Again, they began to question Mary: Was this truly the site of Joseph's burial of their Teacher? Peter was still addressing Mary when the other disciple re-entered the sepulchre. In a moment, he stood again with them. In his hands he held a white square of fabric. It was the cloth that had covered the bloody head of Christ.

On beholding this, there was no doubt left in Peter's mind that in all truth the body of Jesus had been placed in the sepulchre. The disciples now began to speculate as to what could have happened to the body of their Teacher. For as yet they knew not that He must rise from the dead. Had they known this, it would have but confirmed that their Rabbi was the Messiah. They attempted to guess who had removed the body of their Teacher, and where it was to be found.

Not coming to any conclusion, they decided to return to town, where His other disciples might help them with this riddle. They asked if Mary would accompany them, but she refused. Their further urging did no good, only incensed her, and again she broke out into weeping. So they left her there, and went on their way alone.

From His place of concealment, Jesus witnessed this scene. He knew that His disciples would spread the word in town about His

missing body. These tidings would surely not go unheeded by both His disciples and the unbelievers. They would flock here to convince themselves of this unprecedented event. Nor would the newcomers content themselves with a survey of the sepulchre—they would invade the surroundings. Beyond doubt, they would find Him in His present state, and the myth of His resurrection would at once be dissipated! Most lucidly, Jesus foresaw these dire consequences, and knew that they did not fit in with His plans. Cautiously, He emerged from his hiding place and took a few steps toward Mary, who now in the midst of her sobs, was calling His name. As she lay prostrate on the ground, she mourned the loss of the beloved Body and implored God to reveal its whereabouts.

Witnessing this terrible suffering, Jesus could not doubt Mary's sincerity. If He had in His former life not paid much attention to her, it was because in the throng about Him there were so many Marys. To them He was a beloved divinity, and He could show no preference to any one of them. Mary's feeling toward Jesus had even yet not changed. She sought not the living Jesus, but His body—not in order to get response from the animate man but to bestow her tenderness upon Him now and to assuage her grief. This Jesus understood, and He loved Mary the more for her intensified emotion, properly evaluating it as a feeling more consecrated and pure than He had formerly observed in the throng of His woman followers.

"Mary," Jesus said.

But in spite of His having called her a second time, while standing a few paces behind her, Mary paid no heed.

He spoke again. "Woman, why dost thou weep . . . and whom dost thou seek?"

Then she turned and saw Him at this distance, cloaked in His white shroud, which was now permeated with the dust and soil attracted to it by oil which had seeped through it from His body. Believing Him to be the nurseryman, she inquired as to the whereabouts of Jesus' body. Had the nurseryman taken it—or someone he knew of? If so, she besought its return. Falling on her knees

before Him, she implored His aid. Jesus showed no surprise at Mary's lack of recognition of Him, for far from appearing to her in His former noble aspect, He was now haggard, with caved-in cheeks and disheveled hair, His cloak clinging to His exhausted body with perspiration, grime, and oil.

"It is I, Mary," said Christ. "Dost Thou not know me?"

At these words, Mary rose, wiped her eyes free of tears, and knew Him. "Jesus, my Teacher!" she cried, and fell upon His breast.

Jesus stopped her. "Come no nearer, Mary," He told her, "for I am not ready. I know all, but this is no time to speak of it. Go at once to my disciples and tell them that thou hast seen me. . . . Tell them that I have risen from the dead, and before departing to go to my Father, I wish to meet with them. I shall await them in Galilee."

Mary, who could not believe her eyes, stared at Jesus in consternation. Hearing Him speak of His Father, she exclaimed: "No, my Jesus! No, I shall not let Thee go! I shall not let Thee go anywhere by Thyself! Thy lot shall be mine, for I cannot live without Thee, and alone shall go nowhere."

While Jesus thoroughly understood Mary's feelings, it was essential to Him that she should perform this errand for Him. And so He told her: "Pay heed to me, Mary. I know very well how thou feelest, but if thou truly lovest me, thou must do what I ask of thee, for it is most important."

Then, she fell on her knees before Him, and cried: "No! Not so! Forgive me, but I shall not go to say that I have seen Thee, for Thine enemies shall hear of it and once again set upon Thee! What ecstasy to behold Thee alive again! Let no one know of it—let them believe Thou diedst upon the cross! Live only for me, for me, Thy slave."

Jesus then sought to quiet her and to persuade her to carry out His instructions.

"If what thou tellest me is really true, Mary," He instructed her, "there is still greater urgency that thou doest as I say. Bear in mind that my disciples have not found me in the sepulchre,

and that by now they may be spreading tidings of this! Dost thou wish me to be found here? Think of what thou sayest and consider well my words. Go. Tell my pupils that which I have told thee."

Mary interrupted Him. "Thy pupils? Dear Rabbi, do not depend on Thy pupils, for they are not worthy. Was it not one of Thy disciples that betrayed Thee? When I sought them out this morning to come with me in search of Thee——"

"Mary," He said gently, "there are things of which thou knowest naught. Nor shouldst thou know of them. If thou wilt not carry out my instructions, I shall re-enter my sepulchre, and then thou shalt never behold me again."

These warnings of Christ had their effect on the woman. In a quieter voice, now she promised to do all He asked of her. She wished to know only when she would see Him again, and where.

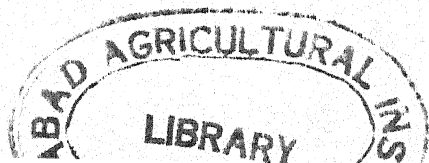
Jesus replied that after she did as He bade her, they would meet again, when they would have more time to converse. He did not need to warn her not to reveal His whereabouts, for she herself said: "One thing only I shall not do. . . . I shall not disclose even to Thy pupils that Thou art here now, my Rabbi."

"It is well," He answered, for this corresponded to His own wish not to be found.

The Magdalen gazed upon His countenance, so ravaged by the last two days of suffering. But His eyes looked out upon her as before, and on His face she saw a faint smile to which she responded with one of her own. Then, she turned and went toward the city.

After a few steps, she turned to look at Him. Jesus was slowly walking away into the Garden of Gethsemane. "I shall return—and soon!" she called to Him.

Jesus nodded in assent.



## VI

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PETER and the other disciple returned to the house which on the morning they had left with Mary. Those who had remained behind had been awaiting their return with impatience. Now, they surrounded the two and began to question them. Soon they understood that what Mary had spoken had been the truth. Their doubts vanished, for the sepulchre of Jesus was indeed empty.

They could not surmise what had taken place. Perhaps Joseph and the other disciples could tell them.

The listeners heard out Peter and the other pupil. Each man present had his own opinion and offered advice as to how to go about finding the body of Jesus. But after listening to them, Peter announced that a decision would not be practicable before they had met with the other disciples. Besides, it would be well to see Joseph; he might have knowledge of what had taken place.

In the midst of this discussion, a knock came on the door. The woman of the house opened it to Joseph; and though she was acquainted with him, his visit now surprised her.

Joseph was plainly agitated. In a low voice, he asked the woman if any of the disciples of Jesus were present. And as she knew of his relation to Jesus and the other pupils, she admitted him and locked the door behind him. Guiding him to the room where the other disciples were gathered, she said to him: "It is well that you have come, esteemed Joseph, for you are sorely needed."

All those present were most glad to see Joseph and surrounded him. They overwhelmed him with questions which amazed Joseph. And small wonder, for only a few minutes before these same questions had been put to him by High Priest Caiaphas and his followers.

That morning, ere he had left his house, they had come to invite him before the board of elders. Since he was a member of this board, Joseph joined the group of rabbis whom he now found surrounding Caiaphas. There was loud discussion among them, but on seeing Joseph a silence fell upon them.

Then Caiaphas bent on Joseph a sternly inquiring glance and asked: "Where is the body of Jesus?"

Realizing now that his meeting with Pilate had become known, Joseph was compelled to relate all he had done. And on hearing him out, the rabbis appeared displeased.

Caiaphas pacified them, and addressed Joseph as follows:

"Joseph, thou art among the rulers of this land. But dost thou think that this entitles thee to go contrary to all our wishes? We knew, even before thou told us, of what thou hadst done. Where hast thou concealed the body of Him who had called Himself King?"

Seeing that things were taking a grave turn, Joseph could only repeat that what he had told them was the truth. And Caiaphas, addressing the assemblage, exclaimed: "See to what a pass that demented Nazarene pretender has brought us! If a man as wealthy as Joseph has become His follower, what can we expect of the impoverished? How far would He have gone with His propaganda, had not the noble Pilate, at our prayer, sent Him to His punishment? But let us deal with Joseph later." And turning to Joseph, he continued: "Thou hast related that thou hast put him into the sepulchre in the Garden of Gethsemane."

Joseph again affirmed this.

"But that is not true," Caiaphas accused, "for he is not to be found there!"

Joseph gasped. "But I left Him there," he stammered. "Someone else has removed His body if He is not in the sepulchre now!"

That morning, the rabbis had requested Pilate to place a guard about the crypt of Jesus. Pilate refused but suggested they guard Him themselves. They thereupon selected some men for this purpose and directed them to the sepulchre. But when these men had come there, they found the sepulchre untenanted. Someone had already removed the body of Jesus. When Caiaphas was informed of this, he assumed that Joseph might have done it for the sake of placing the Master in a more secluded and inaccessible spot.

But he was not involved, Joseph asserted. He, in turn, supposed that the disciples of Jesus had decided to remove Him. The discussion became heated, for Caiaphas, speaking now for the elders, accused Joseph of falsehood and of going against the law of the land. Joseph tried to defend himself, but he was told that unless he found the body of Jesus, for which he had been responsible, he would have to undergo punishment at the hands of the elders.

Then, Caiaphas, who was persuaded that Joseph was innocent of the charge, told Joseph to go and take measures to exonerate himself.

And so it happened that when Joseph, distraught and troubled, left the house of Caiaphas, he knew he must at once seek out the other disciples of Jesus. He was aware of their hideout and now he had come to it.

However, from the questions the disciples and the others present put to him, he came to understand that they, too, knew not who had taken the body of Jesus, and where it had been placed. "Perhaps the other disciples have done this," he ventured to Peter. But Peter replied firmly that this was impossible, considering that Joseph did not confide in them the disposition of the body. Now, the solution of this mystery became no casual matter for Joseph. It was only by so doing that he could absolve himself from guilt before the board of elders. Finding no enlightenment in the discussion going on about him, he prepared to leave.

Suddenly, the mistress of the house ran in and cried that Mary Magdalen was coming. Everyone turned to meet Mary, who en-

tered, smiling happily. They all knew of her relations with their Teacher, and had commiserated with her in her irreparable loss. Therefore, on beholding this new cheerful Magdalen, they did not know what to think.

Addressing Peter, Mary now said: "I have seen Him. He lives. He spoke with me."

Frowning, Peter asked: "Whom is it you have seen? Of whom do you speak?"

"My beloved Jesus!"

The others exchanged glances. The woman must have gone out of her mind, but not wishing to contradict her, some murmured: "That is well, Mary. Now that you have seen Him, you can rest in peace."

"Yes," she replied. "My mind is now at rest, for He lives again—and so asked me to tell you."

They gathered around at hearing this and, while they exchanged eloquent glances, waited tensely for her to speak again. Joseph was the first to question Mary, and joyfully she related what had taken place, and what He had requested of her.

Peter, who had been staring at Mary, astonished on hearing her last words, interrupted: "Repeat all that was said to you, Mary, by this man you believe to be Jesus."

Offended at this, Mary now cried: "You, Peter, did not believe me when I told you His sepulchre was empty! You had to convince yourself personally. Now, I say I have seen Him and spoken with Him, and you ridicule me and take me to be mad! I am repeating what was told me by no impostor, but by our Master Himself! He said: 'Mary, go to my disciples and my brothers. Tell them that I am going to my Father, to your Heavenly Father. I go to my God, who is your God. Let them come to me in Galilee.' Believe me or not, as you wish, I have fulfilled my promise to tell you. One thing only I beg of you. I am in haste and do not know where to find the rest of you. Therefore, you convey to them my Rabbi's words and His wishes."



And now, although she attempted to leave, they detained her with questions. Leave her in peace, she asked of them, adding: "Ask nothing, for I know no more than I have told you."

After Mary's departure, they began to exchange opinions. When Jesus had been condemned, their affairs had taken on a perplexing confusion. Joseph, now still more depressed, also left. He was altogether at a loss how to handle the situation.

On the street, he thought a minute, and then went in the direction of Mary's house.

Peter and the other disciple, having instructed their hostess to inform any of the other pupils who might arrive where to seek them out, also left. They went to find friends with whom to consult about this crisis.

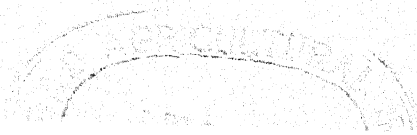
When Joseph reached her house, Mary was not at home. The man of the house informed him that since she had left in the night she had not returned. He suggested that Joseph wait for her, but the disciple had other things on his mind and merely asked that Mary be given the message to come to him. "She knows where I live," he added, leaving. The other man, who knew Joseph to be a very rich man, scratched his chin and muttered to himself: "If she passes this one up, I don't know what the crazy woman wants. I'll tell Rachel." The door closed.

## VII

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AFTER parting with the Magdalen, Jesus went back to the shelter among the trees, where He had sought repose. He was certain that Mary would carry out His admonishment. Even before His trial, Jesus reciprocated Mary's feelings for Him. On occasion, she confessed them to Him, and all that had taken place since His death confirmed the truth of her words. She had assured Jesus she would lay down her life for Him, and He was persuaded of her readiness to do so.

Pondering on this, Jesus' thoughts dwelt on His relations with Mary. He was conveyed back to His past. Manifold incidents passed through His mind. He came to the conclusion that He loved the Magdalen. If He had been unable to prove His love to her before this, the fault was not His. The goal that He and His pupils had set for themselves demanded great sacrifices. They had to subordinate all else to achieve their ends, and this thorny path exacted from Him, in particular, extreme sacrifice. But now, when He had almost reached His goal, He was free to choose His private life. He had not a great deal left to accomplish. Dead for the world, He could now live for Himself, as well as for one whom He loved. For had not Nature herself thrown them together? If only in order to fulfill his ultimate obligation, He needed one He could wholly trust; and where among His followers would He find one other than Mary who would be so self-sacrificing?



This trend of thought brought the Master to the conclusion that Mary was indispensable to Him. Having accomplished His mission, He must now remain in the world as a live corpse. Surely, there should be at least one human being to be aware of Him as a living entity. Jesus had already formulated a plan for his future. It was to be a continuation of the life He had led before. He had been sentenced to die, and this resurrection would confirm the validity of his position as the Son of God.

When the thoughts of the Master concerning Mary reached conclusion, He felt at rest. Contentedly He felt that now He would not be alone in His pursuit of His goal. He was happy that she who would accompany Him was His own love, who would remain with Him even after the goal had been attained. His path lay clearly marked before Him. For He wished only to reach His Heavenly Father, and in this way to crown His life's desire. And He must and would retain the supreme eminence He had already gained. He would prove that He was in truth that Messiah whom Jehovah Himself had promised to the Chosen People.

It was already sunset when He heard steps approaching in the distance. He knew who was coming, and cautiously He left his retreat and began to look about Him. He was not mistaken. It was the Magdalen in search of Him. She no longer wept nor called His name, for she was sure she would find Him here. Seeing her and making certain that she was unaccompanied, Jesus called to her, and Mary, a parcel under her arm, went toward Him. They returned to His refuge and fell into conversation.

Jesus was interested to learn how Mary had carried out her mission; she told Him, adding her own impressions. He then knew who had taken Him from the cross and deposited Him in the sepulchre. When she told of what had transpired in the city after He had been condemned, Jesus interrupted her: "When didst thou last see Judas?"

On hearing this name, Mary looked displeased. She replied: "I searched for him everywhere, after I heard he had betrayed Thee, but I found him nowhere. Late that night, he appeared at

our house. When I reproached him, he was in no way discomfited, but began to speak of other matters. Then, showing signs of nervousness, he left, saying that I was to tell Thy disciples to go to court next morning where he, Judas, was to sit in judgment on those who had judged Thee. Frankly, we feared to go there, for people were being arrested on every side. From a distance we saw Judas when he was leaving the courtroom, screaming as if he were crazed. Those who saw told us that he had tossed at the feet of the High Priest the silver he had been paid for Thy betrayal and had insisted that he be punished. I sorely deplore, my dear Rabbi, that he was not apprehended for his treachery. Is it possible Thou didst not know he was a vicious man?"

Jesus made no answer. Gazing at Mary kneeling before Him, He had turned His thoughts elsewhere.

"And does Judas know that I was not to be found in the sepulchre?"

"No, my Rabbi. He is no longer alive."

"Not living?" Jesus repeated. "What happened to him?"

"He was found hanging from a tree. That was his deserved punishment. When he . . ."

But Jesus, with a motion of His hand, stopped her. After a long pause, He said quietly: "Then Judas spoke the truth when he vowed he would stop at nothing to reach the very goal we sought. And now he has paid our most weighty debt with his life! His powerful will prevailed over himself, as well as over others."

These words of the Nazarene, which He voiced as if to Himself, puzzled the woman. She asked: "Art Thou not offended that he betrayed Thee . . . even to Thy death?"

"Offended?" Jesus repeated, looking at the woman. "No, I am grateful to him. For without him, I would not have risen to the cross. His staunch spirit impelled me toward the fulfillment of my duty. Taking his life with his own hands, he proved that of us all he was the least vacillating—the most steadfast!"

These words of Jesus seemed strange to Mary. Interpreting her expression of perplexity, He sensed that He had said things

which were better unknown to her, for the time being, at least. Attempting to erase the impression of these from her mind, Jesus changed the subject.

After some time, He interrupted the Magdalen, who was relating to Him various tales of life in the town. "Mary," He reminded her, "it is late. Go. As I said, we shall meet in Galilee."

She did not wish to leave Him, but her protests were unavailing, for He compelled her to return to the city. Her infinite love for Him had made a slave of her, and even though she rebelled she could not but obey. Night was approaching as she parted from Him.

## VIII

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WORD of the events taking place after the crucifixion spread throughout Jerusalem. From mouth to mouth they took on an alien coloration. Each attempted to prove he knew more about it than the rest, and even though many stories were abroad, the majority of opinions fell into two categories. The foes of Jesus, on learning that His body had vanished from the sepulchre, laid this to His disciples, whom they blamed for spiriting Him away for burial elsewhere. Should Joseph not be able to prove he had no connection with this, he would be liable for trial by the elders.

On the other hand, His disciples insisted that they had been unaware of what had taken place in the Gardens of Gethsemane. And as they had not been instrumental in the abduction, now they feared that their tribulations would only be aggravated by this latest suspicion of them. Several of the pupils even offered documentary evidence as to where they had been, and what they were doing, at the time. And even while they now hid about, to escape persecution, they sought to meet with each other to discover what had really transpired.

The situation might have lasted indefinitely, had not new tidings spread which caused all that had preceded them to be forgotten. Jesus was alive! He had risen from His grave! He had been seen and had talked with those who had seen Him!

The disciples, conveying this to each other, attempted to

throw light on what was taking place. They argued about it in meeting. Taking into account the sources of the rumors they were hearing, they assured themselves those sources were undependable. Who had first proclaimed the Resurrection? Mary, a lone woman. Who was the first to make known the wishes of their Teacher to them? Again, the Magdalen. Was it wise to give credence to her words and to set out for Galilee? Could not their risen Master have appeared to them in His own person, and made them do that which Mary purported to convey to them as His wish? Some among His pupils went to see Mary, to hear her story with their own ears. But they were unsuccessful. Before the arrest of Jesus, the Magdalen had sought their society of her own will—now, after the dissemination of her news, she was to be found among them no longer. The last they had seen of her was when she had told them of her meeting with the Master and had relayed to them His instructions. After this, she had disappeared.

The distraught disciples, with certain other followers of Jesus, sought in oblique ways to discover the reaction of their antagonists to the resurrection. The word they received not only did not pacify His followers, but also upset them the more. For now, they were being accused of stealing the corpse of Jesus, and of spreading falsehoods as to His rising from the dead. This situation continued to deteriorate. The disciples were forced to evade the nonbelievers and to use more caution in their speech among themselves. They agreed that Mary's words were not to be taken as the truth until they themselves should come face to face with their resurrected Master.

One of them, Thomas, now exclaimed: "I refuse to be diverted by Mary's empty tales! I take no stock in her words, and I would not believe it even if I should see Him, unless with my own hands I could feel of the wounds on His body, unless I could see marks of the spikes. Not until then will I believe that this is truly our Teacher, He who was crucified, and that He is now again among the living! Only then, will I hearken unto His bidding to join Him in Galilee."

These words of Thomas had their effect on the other pupils. They sounded reasonable, and at the same time offered escape from the intolerable situation. Surely, if their Teacher were really alive, He would find a way to communicate with them, and would not rely alone on sending a message through Mary. It was for them now to remain passive and to take into account what direction the people of the land would choose on learning that the Nazarene had risen from the dead.

Having thus decided, the eleven devoted followers of Jesus sat back to await further developments.



## IX

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TWO friends were taking their way along the dusty road out of Jerusalem to near-by villages. One of these was their home, and here by hard labor they barely supported their large families. They owned a few sheep, but these afforded but a meager living. When they wished to augment their incomes, they were forced to take their milch products to the city, and to exchange them there for things necessary for the household. They often went to town together for this purpose.

In those times, all Palestine was under the jurisdiction of Rome. As always in such cases, the inhabitants were taxed for the maintenance of the army of occupation. The wealthy were not irked by those taxes; but the weight of them fell heavily upon the poor who, even without this burden, could hardly make ends meet. The dissatisfaction of the populace grew as the taxes increased. The moneyed men exploited the situation to their own purposes, but the poor were helpless, and this only increased their hostility. The religious leaders of the land, supported in this situation by the plutocratic element, represented this toll upon the unfortunate poor as the inevitable Divine punishment of a guilty people. And it was to the advantage of the highly placed men in the country to confirm this impression in the minds of the populace. The clergy of various sects insisted that it was but the will of God, and the inhabitants were restrained in their resentment by the promise held out to them of a blissful afterlife.

Else, what matter would it be to the rulers whether the land was free or in bondage? Their only aim was to hold captive the people's minds, souls, and property, in return for which they had only to guarantee to the people their immortality. To support their authority over their subjects, they impressed on them the necessity of relinquishing all earthly pleasures in order to gain entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, in their self-appointed capacity as intermediaries between man and his God, they accomplished their ends, and by restraining the people in their darkness explained away vicissitudes as the visitations of the Lord. The Lord made known His wishes through them, and (so they held) because the people acknowledged them as the spokesmen of His divine will, their words were unquestionably the words of God. Oppressed in their dark poverty, these, His children, had faith and bided their time, for to believe was easier than to doubt. Lack of faith would only have aggravated their misery, and they not only would be punished in the Hereafter, but would be subjected to persecution in this, their earthly dwelling. And so, their leaders successfully persisted in their hoax that the lot of man, by the will of the Almighty, was misery. He alone would decide when and how to free them from bondage. His promises to do so, and the fact that Jehovah would be deterred by nothing, had already been proclaimed to the populace by His self-ordained representatives.

It was prophesied that He would send His son, the Messiah, to the Chosen People. Through this Messiah, then, the guilty and the innocent would be disjoined and the pure in heart would inherit His Kingdom, while those whose brow bore the stamp of evil-doing would be pierced by tongues of flame. For centuries, the leaders of the people had vividly impressed upon them the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, the passage of time had not obliterated the people's expectancy. They were waiting even unto this day, when our two friends were leaving Jerusalem.

The slow steps and pensive faces of the men indicated that they were unhappy. For they also were of those who through all vicissitudes only awaited the fulfillment of God's word. They

had already heard of the coming of the Messiah, and they had expected Him to free their people from their suffering. This hope had given them new strength to bear with their tribulations. But the two days they had just spent in the city destroyed their joyful anticipation and faith. He whom they had taken for the Redeemer had been punished and died. How much longer must they wait for the coming of Him who had been promised them? The two men pursued their way and exchanged only an occasional quiet word.

When they were at some distance from town they saw one of their countrymen coming toward them. They greeted him and he walked on with them. The newcomer noticed their saddened expression, and while formerly he had observed them conversing and gesturing, now in his presence they had fallen into silence. This newcomer, who had left His secret retreat and was now clad in the raiment of the countryside, was Jesus Christ.

He had an intense wish to discover what went on in the city and what they were telling about Him, and so He was pleased to find these co-travelers. For a while they walked on silently. Then Jesus addressed them: "You must be going home. The loads you transport bespeak profitable affairs, but your faces are sad."

Whereupon, one of the travelers, glancing at Jesus, inquired: "Are you not also from the city?"

"Yes," He replied.

"Then it would appear strange," the other man declared, "that although you are a Jew, even as we, you give signs of knowing nothing. For in the city there was nothing to rejoice us. . . ."

Jesus expressed interest. "What has occurred? Of what do you speak?"

The other man in turn said to Him: "You must be the only one in the whole city that does not seem to know! You must have been truly absorbed in other affairs."

Jesus knew full well that what they alluded to had a bearing on Him, but gave no sign of this. His companion continued: "Is it possible that you don't know that Jesus of Nazareth, who had

preached to our people, was arrested by our elders and priests? And that they who had been ill content with His words saw to it that He was punished? On their demand, He was nailed to the cross, and there gave up His life. Three days have passed since then."

The other man, Cleopas by name, gave a deep sigh, and exclaimed: "What a great misfortune! For we had taken Him to be truly the Messiah who was promised to us as our deliverer."

"And that is not all," his friend added. "He had been taken from the cross and buried. But when some women sought Him out in his grave, He was not there. They told His disciples, and these, to convince themselves, also went there but failed to find His body. It is said that there are women who saw and spoke to Him, but of His pupils not one saw Him and they refuse to believe that there are some who recognized Him."

Jesus understood much now. That these unknown companions were His well-wishers. And that they mourned that the word of God as to the coming of the Messiah had not been fulfilled. It became clear to Him, therefore, that the message He had sent through Mary had not been given credence. The others continued to talk to Him, but He heard them not, His thoughts being elsewhere. When His endless surmises came to a pause, one of His companions turned to Jesus, inquiring what He thought about all that had taken place.

Jesus knew that He could not be candid with these men, nor could the expression of His opinion at this time benefit His purpose. This meeting with them would serve to confirm the words of Mary. Now, it would not be she alone who had seen and spoken with the resurrected Christ. Here were other witnesses.

His face serious, he turned to his companions and said: "Only those who are mad and powerless can doubt what has taken place. For did not our prophets augur all that has come to pass? Was not our Messiah to come and, after performing His mission, to return to His Father? Has not His coming and every act of His been predicted in the Old Testament? And in this Holy

Book was it not told how He would be born? Was not His coming proclaimed by the Voice in the Wilderness? Read what has been written and compare it with what has come to pass. Messiah, the Saviour of our people, was to be born in the East under the Star of Bethlehem. And so it was. The wind blowing in from the desert was to bring us the news of His birth. He was to be persecuted, and this, too, came to pass. And Our Lord, as He had promised to do, sent His Son as the Messiah to Israel. He was to shed His blood, and then to return to His Heavenly Father. Your hopes have not gone amiss. He was the One you have been awaiting. His enemies have crucified Him, and this in turn was meant to be. Only those can doubt His reality who have not comprehended that which our fathers wrote in the Holy Book. Fortunate indeed are you and all others who have awaited the Messiah. Fortunate are you who know that the Jesus who was seized and judged is truly the promised Son of God. And fortunate, in that even not having seen Him, you had faith. Rejoice, for you were not in error—He is indeed the One promised to you.”

Having thus spoken, Jesus was about to leave His co-travelers. They had already reached their destination, while His way lay farther.

On hearing these ardent words of Christ, the two countrymen were gladdened. They rejoiced that this man belonged to their tribe. They urged Him to stay and sup with them, after which He could pursue His way. Jesus accepted. The rest and the supper were of secondary importance to Him. He saw that His words had made considerable impression on His companions, and He wished to strengthen this impression.

Seated at a table in a small room with a low ceiling, He took nourishment. The lamp hanging in the corner barely illuminated the room with its flickering light. Jesus noted with what respect He was treated. The two believers were still impressed by the words He had spoken to them on the road. Rising and clasping His hands upward, the Nazarene prayed to their God. He broke

some bread mystically into three pieces, and giving one to each of his companions, said: "Take these and eat."

The two men looked at one another, and Cleopas said to Christ in a whisper: "Might thou be He who escaped from His grave?"

Jesus did not answer. He remained standing, with His hands clasped upward. Incredulously, they gazed at Him, while He in turn gravely returned their look.

For a second, their eyes held. Then, the two men prostrated themselves before Him. Without a word, Jesus took His way to the door past the obeisant men. A mysterious silence filled the room. When Cleopas and his companion came to their senses, they were alone. They knew then that He who had accompanied them was the One promised to their people, the Messiah. Abandoning their supper, they left the house. In their exaltation, and to still the tumult within them, they must needs at once tell others of what had occurred.

It was hazardous to confide this indiscriminately, for the foes of Christ were on the alert. The men knew of this, and yet the urge was great to share their tremendous experience. After some time, in a quiet whisper and suppressed agitation, they spoke among themselves. Reaching a decision, they took the road to Jerusalem, for they wished to seek out a pupil of Christ who was known to them, and to relate to him the happenings of this day. En route, rehearsing their impressions, each man tried to emphasize something of importance that the other might not have noticed. They walked on quickly toward the distant hills where the lights of Jerusalem marked their destination.

## X

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JESUS, having left His companions, now took His way to the district of Galilee. He had scarcely reached the outskirts of the village when He stopped and began to look about Him. Darkness was all around. He was well content to have met the two believers, for He had no doubt but that they would spread the glad tidings. Recalling their conversation and the tales they had to tell of Him, He asked himself: Would His disciples heed His instructions? Would He find them in Galilee? What should He do if they did not appear? They had not believed Mary's word of Him. Would they now believe Cleopas and his friend, or would the story of the two men also remain unheeded?

Jesus knew full well that before He could disappear forever, it was necessary for His pupils at least to accept the resurrection as the fulfillment of the prophets' prediction. He was aware that His disciples were already being persecuted by His enemies. Finding Mary's story incredible, the pupils did not possess the strong faith which would have empowered them to impress His word upon the world. The circumstances immediately past demonstrated that the moral vigor so sorely required of them now fell far short of measure. True, Holy Writ condoned this as well as many other things as the will of God; there was much in it to justify the actions of His disciples. At least He could justify them before others, but His own estimate of them would remain the same. The people for whom He had come into this world

refused to accept Him as the Messiah sent by the Lord. Could the small group of followers He had acquired by His proselytizing form the cornerstone of an edifice of new aspirations and ideas? On departing this world, He had only His disciples to continue the work begun by Him, but He saw now that they lacked the faith to do this. He was aware of the dissension among them. He even knew of the words of little faith uttered by Thomas which had made their impression on the other pupils of weak will and vacillating judgment. How could He expect His followers to give credence to His resurrection, when His own favorite pupils did not believe? He had carefully selected these pupils to spread His word over the land. And now it seemed this was destined not to be.

Jesus was convinced, by this time, that not only would His followers not increase, but that He would also lose those He had won. Before He came they had worshiped other gods, and now that He was no longer among them the ministers of those faiths could be expected to welcome back the apostates. This they could easily accomplish. The renegades had but to return and they would escape the persecution which hung over them.

By now, Christ was resting upon a stone beside the road. He gazed toward Jerusalem, the scene of His suffering and torment. That group of unbelievers, called the disciples of Christ, were there. How wonderful, and how impressive, it would be had He really been resurrected from the dead! If the Almighty had truly given Him a new life! With no fear, then, and with no hesitation, He would have reappeared among His people. Instead of surreptitiously leaving His hiding place in the Gardens of Gethsemane, He could have openly showed Himself in the city, and at the head of His pupils and other followers He would have led them to that court which had condemned Him. There, before the foes of Jehovah and of His people, He would have demanded of them to inscribe in golden letters that which had been written on His cross: "Here rests the King of Israel." And upon seeing Him, they would have known He was truly the One who had been awaited for ages! Unhesitatingly, He would have opened



the Holy Writ, and proved to the people that their leaders had been mistaken; then those leaders would have knelt before Him and implored Him to forgive their sinfulness. Thereafter, the sword of the Almighty would have descended in just punishment upon them. As for Himself, neither His cross nor His death would be important any longer. They could crucify one who was mortal. But He was immortal, and so all the persecution by His enemies was to no avail. He would remain among the living, coming to them, and parting from them only at the Divine will. Yes, Christ meditated, thus it would have been—had He really risen from the dead.

But this was all imaginative. Returning to reality, Jesus pondered, on the road to Galilee, whether His pupils would join Him there. He felt that only they could save from extinction the spiritual doctrines over which He had labored with them, and which He could endeavor to reaffirm only through them, now that these doctrines were in danger of destruction. Bidding them to follow Him to Galilee, He had thought to imbue them with that strength which they seemed to lack, and with His words and instructions to support the uncertain faith wavering in them. For He had been resurrected for the sake of His followers, as well. Surely, the Almighty, in giving Him life again, was directing Him back to His flock. When, before His death, His pupils' faith in Him as the Messiah faltered, He had been unable to show them how they erred. Now that they would see Him returned from the other world, His words would instill in them a renewed faith. Now, it would not be their Rabbi, Jesus, speaking to them. By the Lord's will, the Messiah Christ would address them. They must accept His words as the Divine Gospel. For had not an entire people, for centuries past, accepted the words of the prophets as the words of God? Generation after generation of men, even only by hearing these words, took them for intrinsic truth. And now, how could they doubt Him, the living messenger of the Lord? Therefore, would not the living words of Him who had died on the cross be even more convincing than words written in the Holy Book?

The more Jesus pondered on this, the stronger grew His conviction. He felt certain that He could persuade His pupils of His Resurrection. He was in doubt only of one thing: What was He to do if His pupils should fail to put in an appearance? How long should He wait for them? Time was short, it was passing quickly, and events followed each other rapidly. It was hazardous to waver in his decision. Rather, it was imperative to secure firmly the allegiance of His followers. Come what may, He must see them, and at once. If they were vacillating, He must go to them. So decided Jesus, by way of His reasoning and wisdom.

He was troubled by one thought. How should He return to the city? If He were to encounter people who had known Him, His difficulties would multiply, for His foes were searching for His body even now. What if, instead of the corpse, they were able to lay their hands on the living Jesus? To establish His identity, it would be necessary only for them to note His hands and feet. Everything that was at this time shrouded in uncertainty, would be made clear as the sun at noonday. He would turn this uncertainty to His profit, by Himself appearing as the Messiah whose coming was augured by the prophets. His enemies would be put hard to it to deny His resurrection, for they would lack the one incontrovertible evidence to the contrary—His body. If He were to fall into their hands now, this evidence would be no longer needed by them. However, if such a disaster should come to pass, it would be impossible to find a single follower or pupil to confirm His resurrection. Christ realized that in addition to this, not only would the labor of Himself and His disciples be set at naught, but He would only lend Himself to further torment. His hours of torture, just past, were still fresh in His memory. Could He possibly survive such, again? It came to Him that He had but two choices: to leave everything to its normal course, and to continue to Galilee, unmindful of the future and of the fate of His past labors; or to return to Jerusalem, to seek out His pupils, and to attempt to reawaken their waning faith. In truth, the first choice was the easier and the less trying one, both for the present and as affecting the future; the second one, more

difficult and dangerous, even while more essential to the accomplishment of His goal. Hard and trying was His life path, the end of which was almost in sight. Should He sacrifice all this for peace of mind? Or should He once more undertake the weighty responsibilities laid upon Him?

The cool evening air caressed the curls on His weary brow.

## XI

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IN Jerusalem, rumors as to what had happened to Jesus spread extensively. The clergy, the board of elders, and private citizens delegated by them went about town and disseminated the information now in their possession. This information had by this time gone out of the bounds of the credible. In an attempt to attract attention and possibly to be rewarded for these gratuitous efforts by their superiors, the storytellers fell into exaggeration. Some of them gave out fancy for fact—hundreds of corpses, just having left their graves to totter through the streets, were seen by eyewitnesses. There were even those who claimed to have seen personal friends, who appeared to have returned after a thirty-to forty-year visit to the other world.

Such stories grew as time went on. Not only did they increase in number, but they were also becoming fantastic and supernatural. The corpses, having left their graves and now meeting old friends in the market place, were casting up old accounts with their more lively brethren. The air was rife with fights and arguments, and cadavers took on a new semblance of flesh and blood, swaggering through the streets of Jerusalem in search of their families and others close to them.

It is hard to predict what form the rumors might not have finally taken if the authorities did not at last take measures to halt them. It was imperative to stifle these morbid and imaginative creations which had run amuck so contrary to all laws of

Nature, but which the gossipers sought to impress upon their fellow citizens as unvarnished truth. With such myths, the babblers tried to invalidate the eternal and faultless verities which for countless ages had governed the cosmos. Denying these verities as the will of God, these unfortunates were not even able to comprehend that by advancing such tenets they offended Him in whose Almighty name they purported to officiate. Only men without a trace of reason or logic could carry on in this fashion. The All-Powerful who created the universe is the Consummate One, and if life everywhere in the cosmos takes its course according to His will and design, it is immutable and not disruptive by human imagery.

Those who wished to terminate this fantastic gossip approached the subject in the manner they thought best. It was their own interests rather than the truth which motivated them. They knew very well that the Almighty had no need of laborers in His vineyard. Not only the mythical tales of individuals, but also the hope and yearning of an entire people to believe, were as nothing if they contravened His laws. Not finding the body of Jesus in His grave, the leaders of the Jewish religion understood that this was a great blow to them. They realized that His followers would explain this away as a miracle. But a miracle could be performed only by God, and only through them, the empowered ones! And so to belittle His instrumentality in this miracle, and thereby to increase their own prestige in the eyes of the people, it was urgent that they find the body of Jesus. They were not above using any means to this end. This was the reason for having their hirelings mix with the throng, to inform the people of whatever they had heard. Some of them even tried to reach His pupils, in order to pass on their views; and these mad rumors, on reaching Caiaphas and his followers, only served to aggravate them. They tried all measures to discover where the body of Jesus was buried. This they did not accomplish, and were further harassed by the reports that cadavers had disappeared from other graves, as well, and now promenaded through the streets of the city. When the news reached the High Priest

and his followers that some had seen Jesus and spoken to Him, their alarm grew. Even had no one encountered Jesus in person, the tales alone of the other resurrected corpses would have had their effect on the population. But these others who had been interred dozens of years ago had been ordinary mortals, and if God chose to give them life anew, was it possible He had not done at least this for Christ, His Son?

In conference with the elders, the foes of Jesus now went into all phases of this question. Analyzing all they had heard, they discussed what measures it was best to take. On exchanging opinions, they found they were of a like mind as to what had taken place. They felt assured that the pupils of Jesus had taken His body and buried it in some secret spot. At the same time, these pupils were spreading tidings that He had risen and was now walking the earth. This was confirmed by the stories of the hirelings after they had mingled with the inhabitants. Ascribing the resurrection to the will of God, these last were querying how it happened that His self-appointed priests knew not of it, and why they, His intermediaries, had had no hand in it.

One of the elders, a religious fanatic, asked leave of Caiaphas to address the assemblage, and spoke thus: "It is inconceivable to me that among us here there should be even one who does not believe as I do. All that we know or hear now demands of us constancy and no wavering. Nor should we be stopped if the stern measures we now undertake bring to a fatal end some of our people. Far better such sacrifices than to allow the defamation of our religion and our God. We, who are called upon to defend our holy tenets, cannot allow others to interfere with us! For how can we allow the Almighty to evidence His will to our people, if not through us alone? Are we not the chosen intermediaries between Him and His flock? The foolish tidings spreading in town reflect on us, and maligning us, malign the Almighty Himself! Whether this is done intentionally or not makes no difference. The Lord exacts from us, the indefatigable laborers in His vineyard, that we assail and beat down the word of the unbeliever. These tidings are contrary to the will of our

fathers, Abraham and Isaac. How much longer shall we patiently endure all this? If we, the chosen of the people, have today come to a pass where we are forced to take time to discuss measures to combat it, we alone are culpable."

As they heard these words, there was commotion among the listeners. Some of them looked to Caiaphas to answer.

The High Priest knew the speaker well, and knew that he secretly cherished the hope of displacing Caiaphas at the coming election. And now, the High Priest rose, and upon this the elders fell silent. With an invidious smile, Caiaphas addressed the fanatic elder: "I know well that the esteemed member of the Holy Synod has not finished. I pray his forgiveness in interrupting him. I am impelled to declare that I am one of those not in agreement with him."

And now voices chimed in: "The High Priest speaks truly!"

Caiaphas glanced at the speakers with a sweet smile, and continued: "Have we been weak in carrying out the tasks entrusted to us? Are we guilty? And before whom? Have not all the precepts handed down to us by our forefathers, who in turn were invested with these by the Almighty, been devoutly observed by us even to this day? Is it not we, His servants and intermediaries between the Lord and His people, who have treasured those precepts? Do you not recall the sufferings and tribulations of His chosen people? Was it not our prayers which preserved the people in that time of stress? Our forefathers executed His word, and only with the aid of the Almighty was it made possible to them. And in this day it is made possible to us, the spiritual leaders of the people, also only with His aid. The Lord does not extend His helping hand to the erring; and if He has helped us as He has our forefathers, we must be blameless in His sight. For we but interpret His words and will. If the esteemed member who preceded me finds that we have not acted justly, he is inculcating Him whose will we have done. Being a member of the Holy Synod and one of our elders does not give a man the prerogative to doubt Him. All that we do is imbued with His will and spirit, we who are gathered here today are

but His unquestioning servants. Let those who doubt this truth leave this council for today and for all time!"

This short, powerful speech of Caiaphas had its effect. All understood that he would not give up his rank without struggle. What followed now, in word and decision, complied with his wishes. It was ruled that no one could spread unfounded rumor, but would be forced to document it. Should he be unable to do so, he was to be fined, as well as punished physically.

This edict was announced to all the inhabitants, and ensuing events reflected it. All those who saw any resurrected corpses were to deliver them to the board of elders, in substantiation of their return from the nether world. The number of those who saw and spoke with Jesus dwindled quickly. And the men who told all manner of fantastic tales faded from sight as well. The fact that several of them had been apprehended and punished proved to the population that the will of the elders was dominant and not to be disputed. The inhabitants no longer sought each other out, to convey gossip, but evaded all mention of it. Gradually, the life of the city resumed its normal course.



## XII

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CLEOPAS and his companions were hurrying to Jerusalem to tell of what had happened to them. It was already dark when they reached the city. The markets had long since closed, so that they were unable to find their acquaintances. One of them knew the whereabouts of one of Jesus' pupils. They found him at home, and breaking in on each other, the men began to relate the story, which differed considerably from the truth. When one of the men noted the exaggeration employed by the other, he in turn stretched the truth still further. According to him, Jesus did not walk, but floated through the air. When He had joined them at table, two angels stood on each side of Him. And when He had broken bread and given it to them, with His arms upstretched He had melted from sight through the house-top and the sound of the Heavenly choir had come down to them.

One of His pupils, amazed, asked the narrators to repeat all this in the presence of the other disciples. He told them he was about to leave for a certain house where the others awaited him. Let them accompany him there.

Of late, it was the custom of the eleven disciples to meet each day when darkness was falling. They gathered secretly, to share their impressions of what was transpiring. Besides, they were anxious to throw light upon their present situation and to decide what to do in the immediate future.

Mary Magdalen knew of these gatherings. She took no part in them, for she knew better than the others what was passing and did not need any aid.

A disciple of Christ, accompanied by Cleopas and his friend, entered the gathering place. The other pupils were already present. Indicating his companions, the disciple addressed himself to Peter. Peter, interested, drew the attention of his pupils to the newcomers and asked them to tell in detail all that had taken place.

Cleopas began. He had everyone's attention. His story did not differ from the one he had told previously. When he had finished, his companion spoke in turn, but the two stories in no wise differed from each other. The followers glanced at each other in surprise.

Suddenly, they heard the creak of the opening door. They looked toward it; then, with outcries of surprise and horror they began to back against the wall. In the doorway stood Jesus. Raising His hands, and casting His eyes about the circle, He said quietly: "Peace be with you."

The disciples spread in a half-circle, their eyes full of terror, stared speechless at Christ. Cleopas and his friend had prostrated themselves before Him.

On beholding His pupils thus, Jesus comprehended that they did not accept Him as a living entity. Stepping forward, He continued: "What fear you? Do you take me for a ghost? But I am no ghost. Look at my body and feel of it. For a ghost cannot have this frame and these bones. I am He who has been before. . . . You, who have for so long labored with me, were you not convinced that I am the promised Messiah? If you are of such little faith, what can I expect from those who have never beheld me?"

And now, His glance fell upon Thomas, whom He knew to be the most doubting of them all. Looking into his eyes, Jesus said: "Thomas, come near me. For thou wilt not believe until thou feelest of my wounds. Lay thy hands upon me, feel of the sores which the staves left in my flesh."

Trembling, Thomas approached His Master, and feeling of His sores, fell on his knees before Him. He began to implore forgiveness.

"Arise," Jesus said now, "and be confounded. And all you of little faith, be you too now confounded, for you did not believe the word I had sent to you with Mary Magdalen. You waited to see me with your own eyes, and to feel of my flesh, to be convinced. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have had trust. Before I speak to open your blinded eyes, give me to eat, for I am famished. Have you any food?"

The distracted pupils began to run about, and soon fetched forth before Jesus some dried fish and whatever else they had. Christ seated Himself at the table and began His supper. The others, huddled together in embarrassment, watched Him.

Having satisfied His hunger, Jesus addressed them anew.

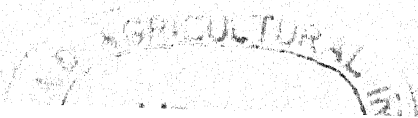
"How could you have forgotten the words I spoke to you when I was last with you? Did you not know that all was about to befall as verily it did? Did you not know that by the will of my Father in Heaven I was to be punished and to die on the cross? Were you not aware that by His divine will I was to be resurrected from the dead? For long years have you labored with me. Repeatedly I have demonstrated to you that I was He whom you took me to be. How weak, then, your faith in me must have been when, on the fulfillment of His wish, you doubted me! Was it not sufficient evidence to you that my entire life took its course as our great prophets had augured? For it was at the bidding of the Almighty that they had set down the word in the Holy Book. It was my Father, speaking through them, who had proclaimed to our people how the Messiah, promised to them, would appear. And I am He, His son, and that Messiah whom you have awaited for centuries. At my Father's bidding, I now stand before you. I have returned from the other world of which you know not. I had carried out His bidding for His people, and at His wish had returned to Him. Your doubting souls have forced me to come to you yet once more, so that I may pierce your conscience and soul and open your blinded eyes. Then, let

those eyes peruse our Holy Books, from Moses to this day. Once and for all, you must understand that all that has befallen has been the intent and purpose of the Almighty. You were chosen by me toward the fulfillment of that end which I had preached to you. You were the chosen not only of me but also of my Father. And now you must continue that which I have begun. I must return to Him, whence I have come—and to you I bequeath His Divine will. Do you therefore discharge it as I have. Carry out His bidding, as did the one who is no longer among you.”

The inspired words of Christ moved His pupils. One after another fell on his knees before Him and, with lowered head, hearkened unto Him. Jesus felt that His purpose in returning to Jerusalem had been accomplished, and this heartened and strengthened Him. He now continued:

“Do away forever with your vacillation and doubts! May the faith I have in my Father be your beacon and the guiding star for your deeds. You are most fortunate indeed to have seen Him who has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I shall not leave you, and my thoughts and being shall always be with you, the chosen sons of our people. You shall be united in the blood I shed upon the cross. My Father did not abandon me in the grave, but, giving me life anew, has dispatched me to you. Nor will He forget or forsake you, or abandon you who have been my mainstay and comfort. Rather will He reward you with the everlasting life after death. You shall see me again in Galilee on the Mount. There you will receive your baptism from the Holy Spirit of Jehovah.”

Jesus was silent. On the ground before Him His pupils lay prostrate. He bent His glance upon them, then walked out of the room. A few silent moments passed. Gradually lifting their heads, the disciples saw that their Master had gone. They arose. So overpowering had been His effect on them that several among them wept. There was no further reason not to believe. Their Teacher, their Rabbi, had now conveyed His wishes to them in person. Before them they had seen Him who had died upon the cross, and they whispered to each other, “Verily, He has risen from the dead. . . .”



Daybreak was nearing as the disciples, uplifted in their joy, one by one left the room. They were going to prepare to leave Jerusalem and journey whither the Master had called them. In order not to attract attention, they decided to leave town in small groups. They would meet on the shores of the Lake Tiberiade, on the Mount where Jesus had often sojourned with His pupils. None of them doubted that this was the hill of which He had spoken.

## XIII

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UPON leaving the room in which His pupils had prostrated themselves before Him, Jesus entered the street—and, at some distance from the house, took a deep breath. Things had passed off better than He had expected. His return to Jerusalem had been fraught with some danger, for He could have been recognized and arrested. Besides this, something unforeseen also could have happened during His meeting with His disciples. Now that all had gone off well, He was well satisfied with what He had this day undertaken. And now that His pupils truly believed in His resurrection, His doubts had vanished. This would greatly facilitate the purpose He had in mind. He was certain that they would heed Him and would come to meet Him in Galilee.

So far, He knew not what course He would pursue in Galilee. This depended on chance. What mattered now was to reach that town unharmed. He knew this district well, for He had been born here and in this vicinity had spent His childhood. Should it become necessary, He could even live here inconspicuously. Nazareth, His native town, was located in Galilee, and there lived His family and some friends, who would, in an emergency, render any aid necessary. To avoid detection by any chance passers, Jesus muffled Himself to the eyes. After traversing numerous streets, He reached the gates of the city. The Roman guard at the gate paid little heed to what seemed an ordinary Jewish citizen

leaving the city. Their duty was only to maintain peace and order.

If one of the guard had recognized the departing Jesus, it is inconceivable that the Master would have succeeded in leaving. The chief guard was a sergeant in the Roman Army by the name of Atel. He had long been stationed in the local armed force of occupation. One of his friends had served here with Atel, a man of an aristocratic Roman family. At the command of the army chief, this man had been transferred to another district. This was the reason.

This soldier had fallen in love with a Jewish girl whom he had met in a house of prostitution. The young man became so infatuated with her charms that he lost his head and wished to marry her and to send her back to Rome. From the beginning, his appearance and abundant means had attracted the girl. Gradually, she fell in love with him. Their meetings in the brothel became so ardent that it was to be expected that their mutual desire would be fulfilled in the near future.

Unexpectedly, a day came when the girl disappeared from the brothel. After a prolonged search, the infatuated Roman warrior learned that Mary Magdalen, as the girl was called, had run off to another man she had fallen in love with. This was the explanation the soldier received at the brothel. A further search confirmed that she had indeed gone to a Jewish proselytizer called Jesus, and all the soldier's efforts to recover this woman proved fruitless. His superiors, learning of this unfortunate incident, and desiring to relieve the young warrior's situation, transferred him to another town.

During the days of his affair with Mary, and all during his search for her, the soldier received the co-operation of his friend Atel. On leaving Jerusalem, he exacted Atel's word that the latter would avenge his honor. Atel promised that at the first opportunity, should he encounter Jesus, he would take revenge on Him for disrupting his friend's happiness. And it was Atel who was now stationed at the gates of the city, but he was not aware that

the muffled man leaving through the gates was He upon whom he was to wreak retribution.

Hurriedly, Jesus passed the guard and disappeared in the darkness, going toward Galilee with a firmer step now. The doubts which had troubled Him when He had first set out for that city had been dissipated by the firm action He had taken. He went forward boldly. He was sure that His goal was more possible of attainment than before.

Considerable time had passed, and He now found Himself in the hills, on an elevation from which He could survey the surrounding country. A milky gray gleam on the horizon showed dawn was approaching. Jesus was fatigued, and the wounds on His legs troubled Him. But He was loath to rest here, where He might be seen. He looked about Him and saw a grove some distance off. There might be a spring. He went toward the trees.

A noise now came to His ears. He looked about carefully, but could see nothing. On reaching the grove, which did contain a spring, He seated Himself. Resting on His elbow, He looked toward the Heavens, where the stars were dimming and disappearing.

After some time, He again heard the noise, this time more clearly. Sitting up, he looked in surprise before Him. The Magdalen, wrapped in a black cloak, was walking toward Him. Even before reaching Him, and before He could question her, she disclosed that she had been following Him. She had seen Him leave the house with His disciples.

"Now Thou seest, my Rabbi, that I never lie," Mary said. "Did I not tell Thee of the gathering place of Thy pupils?"

Jesus wished to know how she had discovered that He had visited them. It developed that she did not know of it, but having decided to follow Christ to Galilee that morning, she determined to see His disciples before leaving, in order that she might convey to Him the latest news. Besides, she wanted to learn whether the pupils had left for Galilee.

"Late last evening," she began her tale, "I took my cloak and



went to Thy pupils. I was nearing the house where they were gathered, when I heard some noise at the door. I took refuge in a near-by doorway, and then I saw the door of that other house open. A man came out and went in the opposite direction. I waited until he was some distance away, for I did not recognize him. But when I joined Thy pupils in the room where they were gathered, they were talking and excitedly interrupting each other. Some of them wept, and two of them embraced and kissed each other. On seeing me, they surrounded me and told how Thou hadst appeared to them and hadst given them instructions. Peter asked my forgiveness for not having believed my story. I was confused, and knew not what to do. But presently I collected myself and joined in their happiness. I asked them when Thou hadst appeared to them, and they said it was but a short time before, in that very room. Peter, silencing the others, joyfully related to me that they had gathered and had been listening to a couple of newcomers when they saw Thee. Those newcomers had not yet finished speaking, when all at once Thou wert in their midst.

"Thou had proven to them that Thou art indeed the resurrected Christ, and had thus admonished them. When I heard this, I suspected that the man I had seen leave the house wast Thou, and I hastened to depart. The pupils urged me to remain and accompany them to Galilee so that I might see Thee once again. But I refused to stay and quickly left the house. Once on the street, I did not doubt it wast Thou I had seen there but a short time before. I wanted to run and overtake Thee, but I remembered I had things at home which were necessary to take along, and was forced to return there. I was convinced that Thou wouldst take the road to Galilee, and I knew the road. I made haste to reach my house. Do not think, my Rabbi, that the parcels I was to bring were of great importance to me. See, I have taken but one of them; the others were left behind. This one I have with me contains the healing salves which with my own hands I have prepared for Thee. They will heal Thy wounds quickly.

"On leaving my house I took a short cut to the gates of the

city and concealed myself where I could watch the exit. On seeing Thee emerge I wanted to approach Thee, but feared lest Thou might bid me to return to the city. So I kept some distance behind Thee and followed Thee here. When I saw Thee going toward this grove I understood that Thou must be wearied and that the wounds on Thy legs must be troubling Thee sorely. I decided not to conceal myself further, for Thy wounds must be attended. Thou art bound for Galilee; I shall accompany Thee. Grant me this, my Rabbi."

In the course of her speech with Him, Mary had opened her parcel and was busily anointing His sores.

On hearing Mary's story, Jesus was convinced more than ever that no one could outvie the Magdalen in devotion and self-sacrifice. True, He had reproached her, but in His mind He fully knew her worth. What she had told Him about meeting His disciples was of much import to Him, for this dissipated His last remaining doubt that to them He was the One resurrected from the dead, and that for His pupils He was the Messiah promised by the Almighty to the Jewish people.

Mary begged Jesus to rest well and to try to sleep. She made her parcel into a pillow for Him. Persuading Him that she would stand watch over Him and see that He was not disturbed, she covered Him with her cloak.

The preceding night He had not rested. His wounds, especially those on His legs, and the torment He had undergone, had taken their toll. And so now Jesus yielded to Mary's plea. He knew that no one could guard His rest as well as she. His eyes closed and He drifted into sleep. The Magdalen, sitting near by, gazed at Him in ecstasy. For her, Christ was not only the Son of God, but also God Himself. . . .

## XIV

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THREE days' journey out of Jerusalem, a picturesque little town lay on hilly slopes. It was famed for its flowers, which possessed an extraordinary aroma. In all Palestine there were no field flowers as fragrant as these.

The little white houses of the town were distinctive in the country. This was Nazareth.

The way from Jerusalem to Nazareth lay among gentle hills. The traveler could see the town from afar. From the western part of it a road issued which led to the town of Tiberiade, and the white ribbon of it disappeared into the distant hills.

It was evening. The sun's last rays emphasized the whiteness of the houses. Two belated travelers stood on the edge of the narrow road skirting the hillock nearest town. They gazed toward Nazareth raptly. They were Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalen. On reaching this spot where the panorama of the city opened before them they had stopped. Jesus gazed at the city of His birth, entranced by it as He had been so many times before. He was well acquainted with the entire district of Galilee, for He not only had lived there all His life but had traversed it in entirety with His pupils. If at this time the scene affected Him profoundly it was because of thoughts passing now through His mind.

Mary, noticing His absorption in the scene before them, in turn doubled her attention.

"This is Nazareth," Jesus said to her.

"I know," she replied. "Wert Thou not born here?" She was silent a moment. "Perhaps it were well, my Rabbi, not to enter the city until night falls. Thou must not be seen. News of Thee might have reached here from Jerusalem. After dark, I shall go alone to Thy house and see who is there. Only then shall I return for Thee."

Jesus, His eyes still upon the city, answered: "No, Thou shalt not go to the house of my kin. . . ."

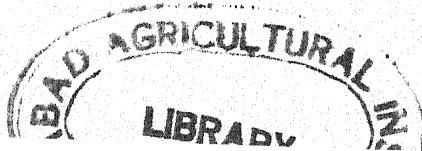
She was surprised. "Why?"

He did not reply. Walking away from her, He sat down upon a boulder. And seeing that He did not wish to have His thoughts broken into, she also seated herself.

She was right. He was absorbed in His thoughts. He was looking toward the city, but He did not see it. Memories passed through His mind. . . . He saw the streets on which He had played as a child with other children. He saw Himself running to the spring in the city square, and playing with the clear, cold water which sprang from an earthen pipe and coursed over the flat stones. This was an arrangement to make it easier for the townswomen to fill their water urns. Sometimes He would remain playing here until His mother, coming to fetch water, took Him home. And not far from the spring was the synagogue in which He had learned His alphabet.

The years passed. He saw Himself as a youngster spending His leisure hours with companions on the hill overlooking the town. He recalled going every morning, as a good Jew should, to the house of prayer. On leaving here, it was customary for Him to have with Him a couple of books given to Him by the rabbi He so loved and revered for his patience in explaining to Jesus the books He read. Under the guidance of this devout old man He had read and come to love the history of His people. When the rabbi had noticed His love of reading, he attempted to help Him in every way.

He recalled further. Now He was a young man of twenty-one or -two. A black beard had sprouted on His face. At this time He



attended the synagogue not only to pray but also to assist His elders in their religious rituals. These elders had already determined upon His future. He was to continue their work, and some day to preside over the synagogue in their stead.

Dusk had fallen. Mary impatiently looked toward Jesus, who still gazed over the city. She could not understand what He was looking at, as the city had been blotted out by night, but she dared not disturb His meditation.

The Nazarene had forgotten her presence as well as His whereabouts. He was still living in the past of fourteen years ago. . . . A train of recollections engaged his thoughts . . . leading to the day He had first left this city. Friends had accompanied Him, full of hope and desire, to a near-by town, a terminus for the caravans of that time. He was bound for the country which was the font of science and learning, the source which would quench his thirst for enlightenment. He had traversed numerous deserts and unknown countries to reach at last His goal, the land of India.

Let us leave Jesus musing as he sits on the stone, while we go back into His past. . . .

## XV

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IN those days, when the young Jesus in pursuit of learning left His home, the East harbored several creeds. Among the outstanding ones were Buddhism and the teachings of Confucius and Krishna. The adherents of these three faiths, who numbered several hundred million, lived in Asia, predominantly in India, and the near-by neighboring territories. These religions had their followers even on the far off African shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The inhabitants lived in their lands as sectaries of Eastern faiths, although they still retained a vestige of the religious beliefs of their own country. In order to observe the rituals of the religions adopted by them, they had designated places of prayer and churches. Clearly, the local leaders of religion could not ignore the defection of these sectaries. On occasion, they persecuted them as traitors to the faith of their fathers. They were accused of forgetting the words and teachings of their ancestors.

The road from Palestine to India was long and fraught with difficulties. But Jesus cheerfully bore with all hazards. To Him, all was new; His youthful energy sought to encompass and to learn everything. When He reached India, His inspiration was boundless, for here was the attainment of His dreams, here was the land which in those times was the source of all higher knowledge. The numberless houses of prayer and churches throughout India were at the same time seats of learning. Here, the leaders of the religions instructed pupils in the art and science of prose-

lytism, so that the pupils in turn could increase the number of followers. The contemporary philosophers and various learned men all belonged to some religion. They taught not only their particular subject, but also instilled religious beliefs in their pupils. Jesus succeeded in entering one of the universities which was among the adherents to the teachings of Krishna. Attending this, He not only received instruction in philosophy but also training in the foundations and principles of this faith. He studied the life of its founder. According to the devout and the religious perceptors, it went as follows:

Krishna had been born several centuries before. He was taken to be the Son of God. His birth had been extraordinary. It had taken place in the town of Matara, from the virgin Devak, who had been impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Thus had Krishna come into the world. Angels had trumpeted that this infant would be the Saviour. And when the king of the country heard of this, he ordered the slaughter of all infants, for he knew not which of them was Krishna.

At the time of Krishna's birth, his adopted father, Nanda by name, was not present. He was in the city to pay his tithe to the treasury. A heavenly voice came to tell him to return home, take the infant Krishna, and to save him from death by crossing to the opposite bank of the river Yumma. This he did.

In his youth, Krishna began to perform miracles. Once, when his playmates were stung by an adder, the child Krishna bade them rise, and upon doing so they were instantaneously healed. Another time, when his companions, together with several calves, secreted themselves in a grotto, the young Son of God, left alone, spontaneously created other children and calves with whom he could play.

On reaching maturity, Krishna took it on himself to heal the ailing, resurrect the dead, and perform many, many other feats of wonder. His enemies began to persecute him. He was brought to court and condemned to death on the cross.

When he was lifted to the cross, darkness was falling. He was crucified between two thieves, and spikes were thrust in his flesh.

After death, Krishna made a visitation to the infernal regions. Then, he was resurrected from his grave, and ascended into the heavens to his Father. He was to return to the earth, to segregate the erring from the innocent.

This was the brief biography of the life of Krishna, the founder of a new religion. He preached that he was the Son of God, and that he had been sent on earth to fulfill the will of his Father. He had many pupils. One of these he loved more than the rest and his name was Ar-Dzuani. On Krishna's death, his followers continued his deeds and preached his teachings.

These teachings were mainly based on Buddhism, the religion which was founded by Buddha.

According to tradition, Buddha, who was born more than a thousand years before Christ, was, like Christ and Krishna, born of a virgin. Her name was Maia. He was not conceived in her womb but by the Holy Spirit and was given birth by God. His advent was heralded to the world by a luminous star in the heavens, and was accompanied by the singing of the heavenly choir. The newborn Buddha was attended by shepherds who accepted him as the Son of God. The infant proclaimed to his mother who he was. A king of those times, Bimbasarakh, fearing the newborn, wished to kill him.

When the child Buddha began to attend school, he amazed his teachers by knowing how to read and write, and by being versed in all scholastic subjects. He was taken to church when he was twelve, and here, in his discussions with the elders he surpassed them and reduced them to silence. Buddha was no ordinary mortal; in his veins flowed the blood of kings. On his entering into proselytizing, the Devil Maru tempted him. Proposing that Buddha abandon his preaching, the Devil offered in return for this to make him the ruler of the universe. Scorning this offer and banishing the Devil from him, Buddha fasted for forty-seven days. And when the fast was over, he was christened Saviour of the world, and during the christening the Holy Spirit descended upon his head. All Buddha's life was filled with the numerous miracles he performed. On his death, he was resurrected and



having then fulfilled his mission on earth, he ascended into the heavens and took his seat beside his Father. He was to come among the mortals once more, to pass sentence on the dead.

His preachment was to the effect that he was the Alpha and the Omega, without beginning or end. He had come on earth in order that he might, by assuming the guilt of man, liberate man from sin. His foes demanded of him proof that he was whom he claimed to be, before they would believe in him. Here follows a brief biography of Buddha, according to religious tradition.

Buddha had many names, such as The Enlightener, The Teacher, The Lord of the World, The Saviour of the World, and The Lord of Lords. In reality, he had never pretended to be more than a teacher of religion. His sermons were filled with high moral precepts and counsels on how to preserve the purity of one's soul. He sought to spread his doctrines among his pupils who numbered over a thousand. His sermons were for the most part based on the ten commandments which he preached. Those commandments were as follows:

1. Thou shalt not kill.
2. Thou shalt not steal.
3. Thou shalt not be a beast.
4. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
5. Thou shalt not lie.
6. Thou shalt not swear.
7. Thou shalt avoid impurity in speech.
8. Thou shalt not be an egoist.
9. Thou shalt not harbor malice.
10. Thou shalt not be prey to superstition.

This philosopher died at the age of eighty. Only after his death did his followers deify him and begin to worship him. Buddhism assumed divine power to be the basis of religion, rather than divinity vested in a human being. The Holy Trinity of Buddhism was the Past, the Present, and the Future. After Buddha's death, tens of thousands of his disciples, dispersing throughout the world, spread his word. In this, they succeeded

beyond measure and in a short while His believers were numbered in the tens of millions.

Jesus, while attending the university of Krishna's faith, was discontent with only one thing. He wished to be omniscient and to learn everything. He was often to be seen in the Buddhist houses of prayers, where He most attentively followed the preachments of the leaders of that religion. There were gaps in His understanding, and these He sought to fill by reading. He tried to penetrate to the essence of all religions and to comprehend their principles and rudiments. He studied not only the teaching of Krishna and Buddha, but also interested himself in the various faiths then existent. Some of these were based on the beliefs of other philosophers, and the most outstanding and widespread of them were the teachings of Confucius. The followers of this sage were prominent in the land.

Confucius, who was born five hundred and fifty years before Christ, was a simple mortal, though of royal birth. He was born in China, and propagated his philosophy as religious dogma. His followers did not proclaim him to be of divine origin, and he lived as a mortal and died a natural death. His ideas and thoughts left a deep impression and not only in Chinese literature. Among his pupils was Jan-Huvan, and to this man Confucius bequeathed the continuance of the work he himself had begun.

The teachings of Confucius are filled with moral admonishments, to rich and poor alike. He directed his words at the people as well as at their leaders. To feel and evaluate the profundity of his ideas it is necessary but to bring to mind some of his precepts: Revere thy father and thy mother. Love thy neighbor as thyself. Do unto others as thou wishest others to do unto thee, and do not that which thou wouldst not wish to have done unto thee. Be not malicious, and do not seek revenge. Be always kind. . . . Confucius left a multitude of other precepts which fill entire volumes.

In the youthful soul of Jesus, all this propaganda and book lore left an indelible impression. In the synagogue of His native city, He had read the history of His forebears, and studied the

Holy Books which were the fundamentals of His religion. Now, on arrival in India, He studied the history of alien peoples and the bases of their religions. His inquiring mind could not ignore the contradictions He found on comparing the fundamentals and principles of the various religions. He intensified his search, penetrating ever deeper into the religious works of those times, in order to find which of them embodied the intrinsic truth. But the further He went, the more confused He became, despairing of His goal. This was not surprising. The mind of young Jesus was as yet not sufficiently mature to encompass the various philosophies of that time. In those days, this part of the world was so distinguished in the eminence of its culture and learning that it attracted serious students from all other lands.

Some centuries before Christ, the noted Greek Pythagoras traveled throughout India and China in order to study their schools of thought. Returning home from his long journeyings, he conceived his own religious doctrine, which he then began to propagate. Many followers of Pythagoras sprang up, not only in his own land but also in adjacent countries. On examining the religious tenets of Pythagoras, it is impossible not to detect in them the imprints of the philosophies then current in the East. Especially, do they bear the traces of the dogmas conceived by Lao-tse, Confucius, and Buddha.

Immersed in His studies, Jesus failed to take note that it was already five years since He had left His native land. This period of His sojourn in India was not without favorable consequences for Him. He was no longer the shy young man He had been on arrival. Now, He was cognizant of the labors of the sages; He comprehended their philosophy and trends. His new boldness led Him to participate in the discussions current in the university. On noting His irrefutable logic and the irreproachable presentation of His ideas, His teachers were gladdened, for this was the result of their instruction.

Had not love for His countrymen been deeply implanted in Jesus Christ, He might not have returned to His land, for He would have been welcome to remain in India, to hand down the

teachings of His preceptors. But when He had left Nazareth in His search for learning, He had one wish only: to serve His people. What form this service would take was at the time unknown to Him; He had drawn up no program. All the knowledge He acquired in India only reinforced His desire to return home. He grew convinced He could at this time be of greater service to His co-religionists. And sensing this new power within Himself, He was impatient to return, in order to begin His work.

In the ranks of the men who, like Jesus, were studying in India at this time, were some who had been sent here from His native country. Among these, Christ had acquaintances and friends. When they met, they often spoke of their home, the memory of which burned in them with a steady flame. Many times these meetings lasted far unto the night. They could not forget that they were sons of Israel, whose destiny appeared to be in their hands.

Jesus now told His friends that He was returning home. He decided upon the day of His departure. It would be during the coming coolness of autumn. He was to leave from an inn from which camel caravans journeyed to Palestine. His countrymen joined Him here, and bade Him farewell, with many wishes of success in His undertaking. He then left the city.

Astride one of the camels, and rocking from side to side like a storm-tossed ship, Christ put India behind Him.

## XVI

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HAVING returned to His native land, Jesus began to attend not only the synagogue but also the houses of prayer of different faiths. Most often He visited the church of the Essenians, and here He made obeisance in the company of other Jews who belonged to this sect. The rituals of this church did not differ from those of the church of Krishna He had attended in India. Attendance of this church together with His co-religionists, a multitude of whom belonged to this sect in Jerusalem, afforded Jesus a great spiritual exaltation. These sectaries were at sharp variance in their character and mode of life from the other local Jews. They strictly observed and fulfilled the teachings and testament of Krishna. In spite of this, they did not deny the validity of the Old Testament and other historical books. They conformed with the laws laid down by Moses and the decrees of the prophets. Jesus not only attended their places of worship but took part in their gatherings. Gradually, He came to know the men belonging to this sect, and developed cordial relations with several of them. There were among them very educated men who did not yield to Christ in the extent of their knowledge. He spent whole days with them, conversing and exchanging opinions.

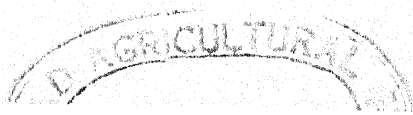
One of these men, John, was known throughout Palestine as an erudite person. He was often invited to the palace of King Herod, to render counsel.

Another, named Judas, was notable for his fiery character and energy.

Christ was of an age with these men. From conversing with them, He found that they too had traveled in other lands. He saw that He was not alone in His desire to guide His people. John and Judas were likewise actuated, perhaps even to a greater extent. Being members of the same sect, they had occasion to meet often. And at times their conversation took a turn to discussion of the history of the people of Israel. Here, the three evidenced a complete knowledge of the annals of their race. They were united in sincere friendship by the similarity of their ideas and aims, and as they had full confidence in each other, their talks and discussions were frank and unrestrained. They had no reservations toward each other, for did not each of them belong to the Chosen People now in bondage to the Roman Empire? They held many a conversation touching upon this.

Sometimes they argued what would be the best way to reclaim their country from their captors. Their long discussions led to but one conclusion: that to do this was most difficult, perhaps impossible. The root of the difficulty seemed to them to be in the conditions now prevailing in Palestine. The Chosen People, who came and conquered the land promised to them here, had at this time neither civilian nor religious leadership. As years passed, the Jews broke up into various groups, each with its own leader; these groups fell into dissensions and quarrels with each other. This antagonism at times reached the point where they began to persecute their own people. Pharisees, Saducees, Samaritans and many other sects—were they not all the progeny of Abraham and Moses? And yet, all the time disputes went on among them, each of the groups adducing the Old Testament to confirm its doctrines. One set accused another of the fact that the Holy Writ of their fathers had been trampled into dust by them. Still other sectaries argued about the Old Testament.

The civilian jurisdiction in this country was in the hands of Rome, and here Rome, through its proconsuls, firmly held the reins. The spiritual life of the people resembled a bouquet of field flowers. They were of varying species and of different hues and fragrances, but they were all flowers of the same field.



When the three friends, as was their habit, went for a walk one evening in the hills outside Jerusalem, Jesus spoke thus to the others: "Sometimes I fear that our people have taken leave of their senses, and know not what they do. In such a difficult time as this, when we are in bondage to the outlanders, instead of uniting the people are increasingly at variance among themselves."

John added: "And not only are they at variance, but they make things worse for each other by false recriminations. This plays into the invaders' hands, for is it not said, 'Divide and conquer'? If this state of affairs should continue, it will become difficult to find even two Jews who are friends. . . ."

Here, Judas interrupted, exclaiming: "Dear John, do not say 'if it should continue.' For continue it shall!"

"I agree with thee, my Judas," John answered. "If I have used such words, it was only to remind thee that time is short. And if we wish to serve our people, we must find a way out of this predicament. For have we, who consider ourselves in the forefront of Jewish youth, the right to stand by and do nothing?"

"We do not stand by impassively," Jesus said. "For if it were so, would we be having this discussion? It is not that we are powerless to imbue the people with our will and strength; it is only that we do not seem able to find the best way to do so."

The ever-restless Judas broke in ironically: "'Unable to find the best way.' If *we* are unable to do this, in whom shall we place our hopes? Once and for all, we must decide what to do, and set out to do it! These months of discussion and argument are leading nowhere. We must approach the question in a less roundabout and a more decisive fashion. Do we really wish to do something for our race? We do! Let us rather resolve on a course of action. It cannot be that our people have lost the yearning to free themselves. Cannot we reawaken in them the spirit of our forefathers, which repeatedly saved them from extinction? We, as the leaders of the Hebrews, must encourage them along the path which alone leads to the salvation of the Chosen People!"

"Listen, Judas," John put in. "All that thou sayest would be

fair enough had we the army of Joshua\* at the time he entered Palestine. Do not forget who is ruling over us! The Romans do not care for people who are not subservient. If we cannot find a way to begin, it is only because we hesitate to go counter to the interests of Rome, at least for the time being. And do not think that because our aims are sincere and disinterested, all Israel will fall in with them. We have two enemies—Rome, and the discordant leaders of the various cliques of our people. Does either of you know any method whereby we can simultaneously subdue those two enemies?"

John now looked toward Judas for answer. The latter, glancing at Jesus, asked: "And what is Thine opinion?"

Jesus answered: "John speaks truly. Were our desire to do so ever so great, we still would be unable to come out in the open against these two forces at one and the same time. We must work so that, at least at the beginning, the Roman representatives pay no heed to us. When we succeed in uniting the people, we can pose the question without concealment. And then we shall have the mass of people behind us, and shall be able to direct their will and aspiration toward our mutual goal. It seems to me that the most important thing now is to imbue our people with a common soul, which would make them act as one!"

On hearing these words of Christ, Judas smiled and, turning to John, said: "Both of you speak as if I were a child who does not understand. This is not the first time you are trying to convince me of something of which I am already persuaded. I do not wish to repeat what I have said many times before. In my opinion, we should profit by the Holy Book. Therein we must seek our standard."

"I agree with you, Judas," John responded. "History repeats itself. But what you forget is that at that time we had one religion and one spokesman!"

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\* JOSHUA: The leader of the Jews when, according to the promise of the Lord, they crossed the Jordan River and conquered Palestine as their Promised Land. Beside the civilian population, Joshua had with him 40,000 warriors.



"And this we must seek to accomplish now, too!" Judas exclaimed.

At these words, John looked toward Christ and said:

"Do you know . . . Judas' words, especially these last, have given me an idea."

Up to this moment, the three friends had been walking about, stopping, walking on again. Now, John sat down on an upturned stone by the roadside. The others followed suit. John's concentrated expression indicated the intensity of his thought.

Breaking into the silence, then, he said in an exalted tone: "You are right, Judas! We must do it, and we shall! I will explain directly. If in my ideas I go historically astray, correct me."

Jesus and Judas joyfully moved closer to John, assuring him that he knew the history of their people far better than they. Pondering silently for a few minutes, John then continued: "The Holy Book is sacred to us as it is to all Jews. The words of our prophets are Holy Writ, not to be disparaged by a single Jew. Should we bring about something to pass which would be a confirmation of the Holy Writ, it would be unquestioningly accepted by the whole Jewish race! Did not the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah give over the word of God as to the coming of the Messiah?"

Jesus and Judas, who had been following the words of John attentively, seemed to wake from a dream and together exclaimed: "Messiah? Yes, it is the truth—the Messiah!"

"Let the Messiah come," John continued, "whom all the Jews have been awaiting, and in whom they believe! His coming shall be as has been predicted in scripture. His appearance and life, yea, even His death, shall but fulfill the words of the prophets! We shall have to create Him in whom our people will have trust and faith! When we have attained this, the way shall be easier. Dissolving their dissensions, we will do away with the various cliques and will unite all sons of Israel about Him. To be successful in this, we must prepare for His coming carefully."

Judas, ever impatient, now exclaimed: "Put the most difficult task upon my shoulders! I am ready to defend our goal with my life!"

"Be not so hasty, Judas," John interrupted him. "It is not your life alone, but that of countless others, that may be needed before we accomplish all we plan to do. The most difficult part, the approach, we have found. Now, we must study in great detail all our ancient books, and select from them all the promises therein of the coming of the Messiah. On these we shall have to base our course of action, which must be so bound up with the Scriptures that the most severe critic shall have no occasion to find fault. In this way alone shall we be able to confirm that He is truly the Promised One!"

The three friends sat for a considerable time, exchanging their thoughts and opinions. To reach their goal, they were ready to give their life.

Their meetings, from this time grew more fruitful, now that they were of single mind. They studied at length the Holy Writ, and the promises therein of the Almighty to His people. They indicated certain measures and drew up an outline, allotting tasks to each. Fired by their enthusiasm, their minds completely filled with the work to be done, the three Jews labored on. Weeks passed, and months. The idea, so haphazardly brought to life, grew in lucidity and scope. It amazed the friends that they had come to this mode of procedure so belatedly. It was for them to prepare the people for the coming of Him who was being sent to them by the Almighty. He would be that Messiah who had been promised to them, and for whom they had been awaiting for many centuries. His birth and life would be in accord with the auguries; He would pursue the specific course laid out for Him. Aside from His routine work, He would be obliged to fulfill all that had been written of Him. And His death, as well, was to come as ordained in the Holy Writ.

One day, when the three friends, so fanatically dedicated, were absorbed in their duties, John said in a low voice: "Of course, it is no secret to any of us that at least two of us shall have to be sacrificed in this work."

Jesus concurred in this. "We should not hesitate, even if the blood of countless others shall have to be offered in sacrifice. This plan and its consummation shall be of untold good to our people."

Here, Judas interrupted, as before: "Let the heaviest burden fall on me!"

Quietly, John continued: "We too, as well as thou, Judas, are ready to shed our blood. It is not a question of which is the heaviest burden. Each of us has invaluable qualities which must be exploited for the good of all. In any event, thou would not make a good Messiah, for . . ."

Judas broke in, offended. "And why?"

"Because, while thou art well schooled, thy tempestuous nature would not qualify thee to serve as the Saviour."

At this point, seeing that John's words hurt Judas, Jesus sought to soften them, by adding: "Be at rest, Judas. It is not the Saviour alone who must love His life. Hast Thou forgotten the death predestined for Him? Who must lay the ground for all this? Thou, of course! For that part Thou art best fitted. It has even been predetermined what Thou shalt do next."

"And this," John took up, "shall be something a great deal more difficult than to be the Messiah! Thou shalt have to, with thine own hands, snap the thread of thy life. Now, take thought on which is the more difficult."

To this, Judas replied firmly: "I shall stop at nothing that is essential to our end."

"No doubt or distrust is between us now; nor can it ever be," John added. "We three are as one, with a singleness of heart toward our objective, for we can accomplish it only together. I shall assume the hardest part of all, the uncertainty, for we know not how our venture shall be crowned nor what sacrifices shall be needed along the road. I shall prepare all for the coming of the Messiah. I shall usher Him into this world as the portended Celestial One, and He, pursuing His charted course, shall go to His death. Then, I shall remain alone, midway to our goal, and alone I shall have to continue until our purpose is accomplished, to lead our people against Rome."

Far into the night, the three meditated and delved deeper into their books. When the hour of parting arrived, they went to their homes with a sense of accomplishment and joyful anticipation of the days to come.

## XVII

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MANY months had passed since John, Jesus, and Judas, dedicated to one purpose, had begun their labors. Things came to pass so that John took upon himself the leadership. Jesus had disappeared and was nowhere to be seen. His time had not come. Then John went into the desert, and there began his sermons. Going from one place to another, he preached the religion of the Essenian sect, and he sought to incorporate in his preaching the words of the prophets from the Holy Writ. By now, he had pupils and followers.

Judas acted jointly with him, as one of his pupils. John represented himself as the Voice in the Wilderness, which had been presaged by the Holy Writ. Gifted with words, he achieved considerable prominence among the people. As this Voice, he proclaimed the imminent coming of the Messiah whom they were expecting. He told the multitude that he was the messenger of God, to prepare the way for His Son. By now, many districts of Palestine had seen him and his pupils, and had listened to his words. He admonished the Jews to cleanse themselves of sin, and to hold themselves in readiness for the coming of the Son of God. He promised them absolution, if they would be baptized by his hand in the waters of Jordan. The believers flocked to this river, and here John, immersing them, gave them absolution.

The number of his followers increased, and John's preaching became increasingly impassioned. Affirming his words to be the wish of the Lord, he closely linked them with the writings of the

Holy Writ. And now, openly and boldly, he proclaimed the near-approach of the Saviour, who was to relieve the people of their tribulations; and thus preaching, John saw the number of his followers increase daily, as well as the number of those who wished to be baptized. He saw that he had aroused the populace.

The soil was now ready. It was time to sow the seeds.

One day when, as had become customary, John was engaged in baptism in the Jordan, the Nazarene, in the company of other believers, approached him as a stranger. When it came His turn to be baptized, He entered the water, and John spoke the words over Him. Jesus then emerged onto the bank.

And now John fell on his knees before Him, and turning to those surrounding them, cried fervently: "This is He of whom I spoke! He is the One whose coming at the will of the Lord I prophesied to you in the wilderness! I am not worthy to touch the hem of His garment! For He is the One we have all awaited. He is the Messiah ordained for us by Jehovah. I was but to prepare you, and to proclaim His coming! Make obeisance before the bespoken Son of the Almighty! Kneel to the Messiah, who has just deigned to come!"

At these words, the multitude, some of them weeping, prostrated themselves before Him who was now leaving them. After Him, two pupils followed, and one of them was Judas.

Thus, as they had intended, John was supremely successful in bringing to the Jewish people their promised Messiah. Jesus had no longer to secrete Himself. He was born for a foreordained purpose and now He must commence His work.

With Judas, Christ now took His way to the shores of Lake Tiberia. He invoked the fishermen here to become His pupils. Some of them, wearied by their heavy labors, consented. In this manner forming a group of followers, Jesus named Judas as the keeper of the treasury. And now, as the promised Messiah, He launched upon His propaganda.

John had brought the Messiah to his countrymen, but his work was not finished. Together with his followers, he continued to preach, inculcating his listeners with faith and reverence in

Christ. It is not necessary to go into detail as to the activities of Jesus. All his actions were bent toward substantiating His words by recalling the words of the prophets. When this activity, initiated by the three idealists, reached its zenith, Judas came to the fore. He did what was required of him in its entirety, and as a logical conclusion gave up his own life. He took action in conformity with the injunction Jehovah had conveyed through His prophets.

John was not destined to reach halfway to his goal. On grounds which could not have been anticipated he was beheaded even before his friends arrived at the fulfillment of their plans. But Jesus, as well as Judas, saw the complete realization of the obligations laid upon Him. Traveling with his disciples from town to town, Jesus continued in the teachings which alone, in their sight, could unite the masses. He was the focal point for the believers who, in turn, would form the nucleus for liberating the Jewish people from their servitude. On being brought to trial by His foes as a self-proclaimed Messiah, Jesus Christ was condemned to death. He was crucified, and on the cross He died, for believer and unbeliever alike.

The proconsul of the land ordered a sign placed on His cross. In three languages, this read: "He is the King of Israel."

## XVIII

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WE left Christ sitting on a boulder near Nazareth, absorbed in meditation.

He might have sat there much longer, if Mary had not heard voices in the distance. Unmindful now of His detachment, she sprang up and ran toward Him and broke in on His reveries. "My Rabbi, some travelers seem to be passing."

Jesus became alert when she repeated her words. They left the spot and finding a more secluded one sat down again. When the voices drifted away, Mary turned to Him. "My Rabbi, it is growing late. Let us go to the city so that I may give out the word. Thou art very tired and it would be better for Thee to go home. Come!"

Jesus did not move or answer. "Where should I go?" He thought. "To my native land, to the house of my fathers as their son? Shall I once again become the Jesus they have known since He roamed these streets as a child? Or shall I come as the Messiah who has been preaching over the land? But the Messiah is dead! In what guise shall I appear to them—as the living Jesus, or as the resurrected Saviour? Come daylight, my presence in my family's house cannot go unnoticed. And once it becomes known, what shall I do? What dire results might this unexpected encounter bring in its wake? Shall I go home," His thoughts continued, "and leave before morning, unseen? Would this be wise? If I have reached Galilee, my followers must also be here. I yearn

to see my kin, but I must not place my new identity in jeopardy by yielding to this urge. For I am already at the Door through which none shall pass after me. If I do not see my family, it will be but one more offering to our common good. No, I shall not only avoid my house, but I shall not even enter the town."

And now rising, He said to Mary: "Come with me."

He moved on, and Mary, seeing Him go off in the opposite direction, thought He had lost His way.

"Rabbi!" she called. "It lies this way!"

"No," Jesus answered. "We shall not go into Nazareth. We shall go directly to Tiberias."

This unexpected decision puzzled Mary, but she was accustomed to obey Him. They circled the town through fields and ravines. Midnight was near, when, after having followed several winding roads, at last they reached the road to Tiberias.



## XIX

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MARY was gladdened by Jesus' decision to avoid Nazareth. She had wished to enter it only so that He might take rest at the home of His parents. Although He said nothing, she could see that His wounds troubled Him. Meanwhile she had evolved a plan.

A day's journey out of Nazareth lay the city in which she had been born, Magdala. She had thought that after resting a couple of days in Nazareth, they would continue to this city, and thereupon things would take a different turn. For in Magdala lived Mary's relatives and friends, who might be of great help to her Rabbi. As yet, she made no mention of this plan to Jesus.

Seeing that Jesus was going on without stopping, she suggested they break their trip at some roadside inn. He agreed.

In a small caravanserai, filled with human beings and beasts, they took refuge. As always, Mary took charge of ordering their meals and lodging. Christ's wounds, which she had laved and newly anointed, were healing. The sores on His arms and back troubled Him less than those on His legs. She pleaded with Him to remain here two or three days, to encourage the festers to heal. She assured Him they would go unrecognized and she would take all the arrangements upon herself.

Her efforts bore fruit. Her companion promised her that they would not leave the inn until the following morning.

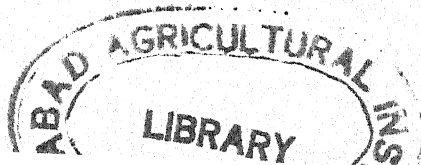
Morning came. The sun was high in the heavens. Jesus was

resting and Mary had looked in on Him several times. Finding Him asleep, she tiptoed out, joyful, for she knew that only sleep and rest would hasten the healing of His wounds.

It was past noon when He awoke. Breakfast awaited Him at His bedside. Smiling, He knew this was Mary's solicitude for Him. He had not yet finished the meal, when she entered, her face cheerful and merry. Mental and physical relaxation had brought back her former beauty. She came near Him and fixed her black eyes upon Him.

Jesus returned her gaze and began to smooth her hair. Thus encouraged, Mary embraced His legs and began to kiss them. After several minutes' silence, she said to Jesus in dulcet tones: "While Thou sleptst, I sat at the entrance to the inn. I saw several people from my town whom I knew. They were bound out from Jerusalem. They saw me and asked me to join them to Magdala, for they thought I was alone and on my way home. I refused, saying I had just left home and was going to Jerusalem. Whereupon one of them said: 'It is well that thou goest to Jerusalem. Our Saviour, whom thou didst know, has risen, and is now in that city. He has been seen by many, but none seem to know His whereabouts. The retainers of the Pharisees are searching for Him everywhere, and are guarding the entrances and exits of the town. When thou comest there, be cautious, do not become involved. Were it not pressing on me to return home, I certainly would have remained there a few days longer. I would have liked with my own eyes to see the Messiah of our people. When He last appeared to His pupils, He told them He was about to go to the High Priest, to punish him. Every one awaits that day.'

"When my acquaintance finished his story," Mary continued, "I appeared very glad. I told him again that once I was rested I would hurry to Jerusalem. Oh, my Rabbi, how joyful I am, how happy that Thou art here and that I am with Thee! For it means that no one has seen Thee, nor does anyone know that Thou art here. All think that Thou art in Jerusalem, and that is well."



This news of Mary's pleased Jesus. He was glad that there were those in Jerusalem who expected Him to resume His preaching. The rumors circulating about Him proved that He had attained His wish: that it be believed that He had indeed risen from the dead. He knew not clearly at this time what He would do next. He understood that He could not indefinitely remain resurrected. It was now eight days since He had come to life in the sepulchre. In this short interval, He had succeeded in remaining inconspicuous, and in reaching Galilee fortunately whole and unharmed.

Rumors of His resurrection were spreading in the city and the environs. His pupils had also come to believe in this, and by word of mouth news of this miracle would spread throughout the land. At the time of His crucifixion, He had almost lost hope that their efforts would be crowned with success. Now, conditions had improved; Jesus felt assured that His efforts to gather about Him pupils and followers were bearing fruit. When He had instructed the pupils to meet Him in Galilee, He knew they would come. At that time, His plans were uncertain; His wish was to meet with them away from Jerusalem, and to take time to consider the present phase of their affairs. It was clear why He had designated Galilee for their next foregathering. Having come from this district, He could more easily evade persecution; and being acquainted with this mountainous region, in which the roads were few, He could take refuge in it for long intervals. And if, by chance, He should be encountered, this could be explained away by His newly resurrected being. Then, too, in bidding the pupils to meet Him in Galilee, He took into account that they themselves were of that town. Being deprived of their Teacher and guide, and undergoing persecution, what were they to do? There was no doubt that by any manner possible they would elude their persecutors and seek to return to their native city. Here their family and friends would serve to make them forget their past. Galilee was the most appropriate and desirable country both for Christ and His followers. And so the choice of this district was logical and wise.

Jesus understood that He should chart out His course before He gathered His pupils on the site He had designated. When He had last seen them in Jerusalem, He told them He was to return to His Heavenly Father, but before doing so, He must meet with them once more. True, it was possible for Him to remain with them for some time, and to continue His propaganda; this would not belie His words, for He had not said how long He would be in their midst. But would it be reasonable, Jesus pondered now, to remain with them for any length of time, now that He was the resurrected Saviour and no longer of this world? Would this not obliterate from their minds the overpowering effect created by His resurrection from the grave?

Caressing Mary's head upon His knee, Christ sat immersed in thought. The situation was difficult and demanded careful consideration.

Should He be arrested again, how would He explain all that had taken place? If once more He should have to face His accusers, would He be able to find words to free Himself from punishment? For He was already not of this world. How would it seem to His pupils and His followers? If, in truth, prompted by divine enlightenment, the inquiring minds of His disciples should become suspicious and ask of Him what He had seen in the other world, what was He to reply? He would not be able to admit that He had not died, for this would negate His resurrection. And to demonstrate that He had really died would oblige Him to relate to them what He had witnessed in the grave, and what He had come to know of immortal life beyond the grave, precisely, and in detail. He would have to tell them of life in Heaven and Hell. Should His emboldened pupils progress to the point of inquiring about His meeting with the Almighty and with the prophets, what was He to tell them? For He felt they had the right to know about those things which He preached—the more they understood, the better they would be able to proselytize. Was not He the one best fitted to inform them, who had returned from the other world and was the first among His people to do so? His return and accounts of what He had seen

would once and for all illuminate all such issues which heretofore had been beclouded. He was the first Son of Israel to have seen Heaven and Hell, and to have returned then to the world of mortals.

All these musings only served to confirm in Jesus' mind the conviction that He could not remain long with His pupils. He must not allow His presence, as the Resurrected One, to become a matter of course to them. To appear among them suddenly, then again to disappear, would make infinitely more of an impression than were He to remain permanently among them. He must see them, if only once more, to arouse them to action. Besides, Jesus felt it urgent at this time to pick out His successor. Perhaps, thought He, things would take a turn for the better for them. Perhaps they would be better able to execute the visionary venture in which He, John, and Judas had started.

Christ recalled the times He had been among His pupils, and how even at that time envy and dissension had existed among them as to who among them, in point of seniority, and by his Master's own preference, would be chosen to carry on His work. When He was among them, and there was no need as yet to pick His successor, He had reproached them for their bickerings. Now the situation had changed; they were truly in need of a leader whose sway over them would be the more indisputable since he would have been appointed by their Resurrected Teacher. To be selected as their spiritual guide by a Messiah not of this world would create great moral prestige for the disciple. Because He had returned from the other world, from His Heavenly Father, His indication of a successor would be taken as the wish of the Lord Himself; and this, in the eyes of His disciples and followers, would be irrefutable confirmation that in all things they must heed Him and follow His instructions.

Jesus now made His decision. Arising, He held out His hand to Mary who on her knees before Him had been silently waiting.

"We shall leave here at dawn and go on to the shores of Lake Tiberias," He said to her.

On hearing this, Mary understood that Jesus did not wish to go to the city of Magdala, as she had expected. She could not divine what was passing in her Rabbi's thoughts, nor what decision He had arrived at. Trying to understand, she asked Him quietly: "Rabbi, why dost Thou not wish us to go on to Magdala? Surely that would be the safest place for Thee."

Mary's sincerity moved Jesus. He knew not what answer to give her. He could not openly disclose to her what He did and thought, because for Mary He had been resurrected from the dead, as He had been for others. Had He the right to disrupt her faith? If she knew what had really happened, would she remain the same toward Him? If she were not infinitely in love with Him, she might have been induced to view the situation more realistically. How much longer, Christ now pondered, would He be able to retain that blind faith of hers which made of her His unquestioning follower?

The situation He found himself in filled Him with foreboding. Nevertheless, from time to time He pondered on Mary. He was aware that her presence awoke in Him a sort of new virility and desire. He found that when He was about to take some action, often He asked himself whether such a step would serve to separate them. He had come to no decision concerning the Magdalen. Above all, first He had to deal with the issue of His rebirth. He could not face His future serenely while He was wandering about the land as one resurrected from the dead. This state of affairs could not go on indefinitely. He must go to His Father as He had proclaimed He would. In so doing He would at once achieve more goals than one. He would convince His pupils of the authority of His words, and this would encourage them to pursue their course. He would confirm that His life had been conducted as had been prophesied by the prophets. In the eyes of His followers, He would indubitably be the true Messiah. Freed from the ambiguous state of one resurrected, He would be ready to face His future existence.

Christ turned to Mary, who had been silently awaiting an

answer to her question, and said: "Dost thou not know that I must go to my Heavenly Father? Dost thou not know that I am of serene mind in all places, for I am not of this world?"

On hearing that Jesus was again contemplating returning to the Almighty, the woman interrupted Him: "Surely, my Rabbi, Thou wilt not abandon me, but rather wilt take me with Thee?"

"Thou canst not go on with me, Mary," He said, "for my way is hard."

She barely let Him finish, but broke in. "No, my All-powerful Rabbi! For me, nothing is hard if I can only remain by Thy side and go where Thou goest! I cannot lose Thee again. If Thou shouldst forsake me, I shall not wait for my reason to leave me, I shall put an end to myself with my own hands! For life without Thee has no meaning for me. Thou didst preach to us that every mortal will return to his Maker, Thy Father, and when I reach His Divine presence, I shall see Thee again! Thou must believe me that I will not part from Thee. Shouldst Thou leave me, know that I shall follow Thee of my own will. Do not abandon me, Thy servant. Take pity on me, for Thou art of me, as I am of Thee, and we are as one!"

Unable to restrain herself, Mary began to weep, and falling on His breast continued to implore Him to have compassion and not to leave her.

Jesus was confused. "Quiet thyself, Mary, there is no need for tears. It grieves me to see them. If I wish to join my Father, it is because it has been so ordained. It is for this I have risen. While I am still here, Thou must leave me undisturbed to do that which I must. Thou must believe that it is for thy good, also. If thou wishest to be of help to me, it were well for thee to go and find out whether my disciples arrived in Galilee."

No matter in what travail Mary found herself, she could deny Him nothing. Wiping away her tears, she looked at the Master sadly, as if asking Him for alms.

Night was falling when the Magdalen, her cloak about her, emerged onto the street.

## XX

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THE disciples of the Nazarene, inspired by new faith, had left the city of Jerusalem in small groups. They went by different routes to Galilee. Since they had spent most of their life in this district, they knew it well. Many of them had left their kin here. They were filled with gladness and with hope that at last they would find surcease from their difficulties of the past couple of years. Their common destination was the small hillock rising beyond the Lake of Tiberias. This lake, otherwise called Genesaret, and the Sea of Galilee, was seven to eight miles wide and eighteen or twenty miles long, and was located in the district of Galilee. It lay six hundred feet below sea level. It was supposed that on the site of this lake an active volcano formerly existed. The lake was surrounded by hills on which at that time were built Capernaum, Tiberias, Bethsaida, Magdala and other small towns. The whole district was of fertile soil; olives, especially, flourished here. The lake abounded in various fish. Nearly all inhabitants of this district were engaged in fishing and horticulture.

It was here that Jesus had begun His proselytizing and annexed to Himself disciples who were fishermen. He had gone back and forth in small boats across the lake with them. And it was here that, according to tradition, He had displayed His power by calming the troubled waters, so that His disciples might not drown. Here, too, before the eyes of His pupils He had walked



upon the lakes. The River Jordan flows south at this point into the Dead Sea. Entering the Lake of Tiberias at the small town of Korusain, the Jordan emerged at the village of Tarieshe. It merged with the River Varmoot at some distance beyond, and snakily, then, the two streams flowed into the Dead Sea. Tarieshe and Hamamat were two small villages in this vicinity, between which a hill stood, the western side of which formed part of a mountain chain.

From the peak of this hill, a beautiful view of the lake could be had. In clear weather, not only could one see the surrounding towns, but the panorama of the lake unfolded in its entirety. It was in this neighborhood that Jesus loved to walk with His pupils, and they assumed that this hill was the one He had in mind when He bade them to gather here. They were right.

Some of the pupils had already reached the town of Tiberias. Although this was their native land, they conducted themselves with discretion. The news of the resurrection had reached even this territory. The local religious leaders, too, took measures to apprehend those who were spreading rumors of it. Here also the pupils of Jesus were unable to express themselves openly; besides, they had not yet met with their Teacher, who was to indicate to them the course they should follow. To unite in a body and to go to the mount whither He had called them had its hazards. The pupils did not wish the inhabitants to know for what purpose they had returned here, to the locale in which they had abandoned their work in order to follow in His footsteps. For their Teacher had held out to them promise of a better life.

The trade of a fisherman is difficult and uncertain. Some nights, the net catch was too scanty to meet their daily needs, but in order to support their families they were continually forced to risk their lives. This was why they were impelled to abandon their work and to become followers of Jesus, hoping that life would thus be made easier for them. It was nearly three years since they had last worked at fishing. Now that they had returned home, their future was uncertain. They did not know

how they would make a living. It could be that their forthcoming council with Jesus might throw light on this situation; then again, it might not.

The disciples now gathered in a village adjacent to the mount where they were to meet Him. Two of them, inhabitants of this village, went to the hill in search of Him, but returned disappointed. They all began to discuss what to do.

Peter, who was held in esteem by them, said: "I do not think it wise to stand idly by until our Teacher carries out His promise. All know that we are His chosen pupils. What will they think when they see us gathered and loitering here? That will arouse suspicion, and the consequences might be grave, not only for us but also for our Rabbi. Besides, we must take thought for our subsistence. I know not what He means to say to us here, but we must provide for our future. Whether you are with me in this I know not, but I must go and take up my former work! In this way, I shall be able to support myself, as well as to carry out His wishes. I shall try to work in this vicinity, and should He appear, I shall surely see Him. This will cast no suspicion on me, for I have fished about here since I was a child. Should our Teacher instruct us differently, I shall be able to leave this work, as I have left it before."

The pupils were favorably impressed by Peter's words; they thought he spoke wisely. They followed his suggestion. Once again they became fishermen and went out to sea in their boats. They tried to stay near shore and to keep in sight so that one on the hill might find them easily. As Peter was responsible for their return to their labors, his authority over them increased. Besides, he was a man better informed and experienced than his companions. The other pupils submitted to him and obediently followed his direction. The sight of the men working near the shores became a familiar one. Their work over, they lit bonfires on the beach, ate their supper and carried on their discussions. In this mode of life they were in no wise different from thousands of other local inhabitants.

## XXI

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THE news which Mary brought Him gave Jesus much joy. He knew now that His pupils, by various means, had reached the Lake of Tiberias. Mary informed Him that they were engaged in their old occupation of fishing near the mount on which they agreed to meet. As she was a native of this land, it was not difficult for Mary to obtain news of whatever was of interest to Jesus. While performing errands for Him, the Magdalen went into the city of her birth. This was but one of many times she had entered Magdala for short intervals. Her friends and kin were accustomed to her unexpected appearances. Her present visit to Magdala was an essential one; she had an urgent need to see a few people. Her departure from Jerusalem was so hasty and unanticipated that she had taken no thought for the future, and now it became a necessity for her to make provision for it.

In this she was successful. She rejoiced to see that the news she had to give Jesus gladdened Him, and she was pleased that she had been able to obtain some money.

On their third day in the caravanserai, Mary went into the town for tidings. Late that evening, the two travelers left the inn and made for the southern shore of Lake Tiberias. The wounds of Christ had almost healed, and the rest He had taken revived His waning strength. They were so absorbed in conversation that they did not notice how they reached the village of Setapres, which lay on the shore of the lake. Not wishing to enter

the village, Jesus turned right and began to ascend the foothills surrounding the sleeping community. Mary followed Him unquestioningly. At some distance up the slope, they stopped and sat down to rest on a ledge in the rocks.

Dawn was nearing. At their feet lay Lake Tiberias. The rising sun played upon its wavelets. From here they could easily see the hill of which Jesus spoke to His pupils. Nature was waking, and so were the people in the village below. They could see them begin their daily tasks; they could observe them undisturbed. It did not occur to the busy villagers that they were being watched from above.

Hours passed. Jesus said to Mary that now He must take His way alone to the meeting place with His pupils, as He had promised them. She said nothing, for from experience she knew that any protests would be unavailing. She only asked that He use caution and return as soon as possible, adding that she would await Him on this spot. Jesus then made His way to the hillock. Mary gazed after Him, but when He was some distance away it was difficult for her to follow His progress. At times, she could make out His form. Then He would disappear, only to reappear from behind some boulder. There was nothing strange in this; for centuries rain and winds had been at their task of erosion, and great rocks had weakened and crumbled into boulders of various sizes. One had to pick his way among them; some of them were five times the height of a man. It was clear to Mary why her Rabbi disappeared from sight every now and then. This spectacle now moved her to decision. If Jesus could thus, even if unintentionally, evade observation along this route, so could she. Her hesitation did not last long. She rose and, slipping unobserved from one boulder to another she followed her Rabbi. Had she wished to do so, she could have approached Him closely; but this was not what she intended. She wanted only to keep Him in sight; she had no wish to disturb her Master after He had told her He was going to meet His pupils. Nor did she wish them to catch sight of her.

Jesus moved forward, unsuspecting that His every movement

was observed. He was already approaching the hillock, the slopes of which ran down to the waters of the lake.

The pupils of Jesus had for some days now been engaged in their former labors, but every night, the day's work done, they gathered together and supped on the beach. While some were occupied preparing the meal, others ascended the hill to look for their Teacher. Not finding Him, they would return, disappointed. They were not losing hope, but impatience was beginning to arise. They were surprised at their Rabbi's nonappearance, and at times during their conversation they attempted to explain his absence. Always, they would reach the conclusion that come He must, but at a time best known to Himself.

On this morning, as heretofore, they pushed off from the shore in a small boat. Some of them, waist-deep in water, were dragging the nets. Suddenly, one of the men rowing noticed someone standing on shore; and scrutinizing him carefully, he exclaimed: "Peter! There is our Teacher!"

This cry drew everyone's attention. Gazing toward the beach, they verified that someone was standing there and looking after them. Some of the pupils rowing the boat, others swimming, hastened toward the shore. In spite of Jesus' garb of an ordinary Galilean and of the traces of recent suffering disfiguring His countenance, none of the disciples doubted that this was their resurrected Teacher. On reaching shore, they knelt before Him. Jesus suggested that they break fast, but silence greeted this suggestion and no one dared to speak or move.

The Nazarene smiled on His pupils. Then he turned to Peter. "Peter, thou lovest me more than the others?"

The pupil began profusely to affirm this. Then Jesus proposed that Peter take His place and assume the duties as shepherd of His flock. After a few seconds, He repeated His query, and again the pupil reassured his Master that in truth he loved Him more than did the other followers. Then Jesus addressed the rest of His pupils and suggested that they pay all heed to Peter, for He was designating him as their senior. Raising His arms, Jesus blessed them and pronounced:

"With this, I pass on to you the Holy Spirit bestowed on me

by my Father. From this day on, may you be invested with it! Go, now, to all corners of the land and preach that which I have taught you! Let fear and doubt be banished from your hearts, for you are now filled with the Spirit which will protect you from all evil! Do not fear even the serpents, for they will wither in your hands. The strongest poison will not harm you. You have power to give absolution to the faithful and to punish the unfaithful. Carry on your preachments everywhere, boldly and openly, for the Holy Spirit with which I have imbued you will protect you from all hazards. Preach in the name of the Father, His Son, and the Holy Ghost. Confirm to all everything you have seen and heard. Witness in all places, how at the wish of the Lord, His Son was resurrected from the grave. Christen all believers, and they will be saved; and the mockers shall be condemned for all eternity. For I am always with you, and within you. You have had faith, therefore witness you to the world that all the wishes of my Heavenly Father have been fulfilled. That has come to pass which He, through our prophets, has promised to our people. Pray to my Father, to your Saviour whose eyes are today upon you, and who will lend you His strength. Testify ever to that truth which you have seen."

The bewildered pupils of Jesus knelt before Him and prayed silently. Addressing Peter, He continued: "Peter, thou hast been chosen by me. My wishes are the wishes of thy Heavenly Father. Follow me."

And now Jesus began to move away from His pupils, and Peter walked after Him. One of the pupils rose and started to follow them. On seeing this, Peter asked Jesus: "Is he also to go with us?"

Jesus responded that the pupil was to remain with the rest.

Walking away some distance from the hill, Jesus turned to look at His pupils who were still kneeling on the sand. Peter stood near his Master, trembling with agitation. Jesus then asked him:

"Tell me, Peter, dost thou really love me more than thou lovest the others?"

Peter, who had answered this same question twice before,

became somewhat embarrassed. "Son of the Almighty, art not Thou omniscient? Why dost Thou insist?" Kneeling before Him, he added: "Indeed, I love Thee more than the others." In abashment, he gazed down at the stones, for it shamed him to meet the eyes of Jesus.

"Be their guide," Christ bade him, "and set to work on the task I have charged thee with." Saying this, He circled the boulder nearby, and disappeared from view.

Hearing no further word from Him, Peter lifted his head and saw that his Master was no longer there. He arose, looked all about him, but all he could see were the pupils huddled on the shore of the lake. He ran to them, saying to himself: "It is I whom He selected as their mentor! I, whom He chose as His successor!" And when he reached the others awaiting him, he cried: "Our Rabbi has fulfilled His promise! He has appeared to us, and now has gone on to His Heavenly Father! He taught us the task now before us, and this very day we shall set out to execute His wishes."

None protested. Heretofore, they had voluntarily accepted Peter as their leader; now, his authority and power had been confirmed by their Teacher, and there could be no thought of disobeying him.

Jesus was returning to Mary. He knew not that the Magdalen, observing them from a near distance, saw His pupils gazing toward Heaven. Reaching the spot where He had left her, He saw she was no longer there. He was searching for her, when He saw her approaching from the opposite direction. Overjoyed at her appearance, He said: "I have seen them."

Mary, who had watched everything clearly, said nothing. She feared that her following of Him would displease her Rabbi. Caressing His hair, after He had seated Himself, she inquired: "Thou wilt not go again to Thy pupils?"

Jesus looked at her cheerful face. Smilingly, He answered: "No. I no longer have any pupils, and they no longer have me

as their Teacher. I have parted from them forever, and now I shall go to my Father."

"But what about me?" cried the Magdalen in dismay.

"Thou shalt go with me," He said.

At this, she fell at His knees and began to kiss His feet. She was content; she was infinitely happy.



## XXII

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WITH the evening came a cool breeze. Darkness gradually stole over the villages lying in the foothills. Jesus Christ and Mary were descending the slope. This was the first day that Jesus breathed freely since He had awakened in the sepulchre. It was still incredible to Him how miraculously He had escaped death. It is true that at first He had been confused, for on the cross He had felt His end gradually nearing. In suffering and torment, He knew that He must persist in His task, even unto His death. But He did not know that He was again to live among the mortals.

When He had regained consciousness and understood what had happened to Him, a youthful will to live revived in Him. So boundless was this will that His reason found the only way to save Himself from real death, and at the same time to put His ideas into execution. His acute mind at once gave birth to an idea. Simultaneously, He would save His life, and would credit His name with a miracle performed! In carrying out His ideas, He was served by the tales which had their origin in the Holy Books of His people. The short interval in which, according to His decision, He was to appear as resurrected had been most difficult for Him, and His wounds aggravated the situation. If, during this troublesome period, the Magdalen had not come to His aid, it would be hard to predict what turn His project might have taken. Jesus thoroughly appreciated the assistance He had received from this worshipping woman. Could He have foreseen the

events which were to follow, He would have prepared for them before his crucifixion. Because of the extraordinary developments, He had been forced to seek a way out, and this He found. Not only that, but His plan had assured the future glory of His work. Walking along beside Mary, Jesus realized that He had truly come alive only when He had surmounted the difficulties confronting Him. It was only now, this very day, that He was truly resurrected, for He had brought to an end all the rumors surrounding His name. The Jesus who had preached a new religion to His people was no longer in existence. In their imaginations, there was no longer a Messiah bound on His mission. The Saviour had disappeared from the sight of all, for He had returned to His Father. Behind Him, He had left His pupils who now must needs go and preach. Their preachments would not be only the words of the resurrected Jesus, but they would be the message of One who was no longer among them, who had ascended to the Infinite. It was possible to persecute and to punish one who existed, but Jesus was now beyond the touch of all things mortal, whether at the hand of friend or foe.

Increasingly joyful, Jesus and Mary conversed as they neared the River Jordan. Now He no longer existed for anyone except the Magdalen, and he who walked by her side now was not the Messiah but an ordinary mortal. Christ, the predestined Redeemer of the Jewish people, in soul and in body had passed from this world. If there was life left in His present being, it was for His own sake alone; and had He so wished, even this flesh would disappear. But this would not change the life He had led. His soul had departed in His resurrection, and from that moment on His living flesh was of interest to Himself alone. The embodiment of it, together with His identity as the Christ, had ascended with His spirit to the Almighty Father. The only one cognizant of the truth was Himself, and even Mary Magdalen did not doubt that He had risen from the dead. Her assurance of this only intensified the boundless love she bore Him.

Nearing the shores of the Jordan, Jesus did not yet know how His corporeal self would commence its new life . . . nor in what

way the association of Mary Magdalen with the resurrected Messiah would develop.

The dense thicket along the lakeshore was a fitting place for concealment. Finding an appropriate spot, Mary began to prepare breakfast for her Rabbi. Jesus looked on at the river flowing at His feet. Little waves stole up on the shore and crept forward, caressing the overhanging willow branches. The gentle sound of the lapping water came to the ears of the travelers; the stream greeted the weeping willow trailing on its surface; the wavelets fondled the branches, ancient attestants to the saga of the Jordan. Jesus gazed at the river and hearkened to the soft music of the waters.

Having finished their meal, they rested. They had sufficient time, since they would be obliged to remain here until evening. The Nazarene, reclining a short distance from the beach, closed His eyes. Mary, believing Him to be asleep, sat a few yards away at the base of a tree. She, too, gazed at the streaming water, lost in reverie.

Jesus' eyes were closed, but He was not asleep. He continued to listen to the song of the Jordan. This was no mere song; it was the age-long lament of His tormented people. The river spoke out as the living witness to the past, as a vassal of the Almighty; it told of the glories that had passed. Once, long ago, its waves had formed a mighty, indestructible bulwark at the bidding of Jehovah, and at His bidding the people making their way from the desert into the Promised Land had found a way across the Jordan. This was the river which had put a wall between His people and the travail which had formed a chapter of their history. On its banks a new and more exalted life had begun for them. Forty thousand armed warriors, in whose veins flowed the same blood as in Jesus, had traversed the bed of this stream. At God's will, the Jordan arose in two mounts, and opened its arms to the wanderers to afford them passage. After long years of exile during which they fared on Heaven-sent manna, the people had again found nourishment. The roads leading from Egypt to the Jordan were dense with thousands of

them. And thus, at the will of Jehovah, this river had played its part in the history of a great people.

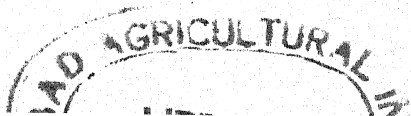
But its task had not yet been accomplished. In the glorious pages of history, it lived until the advent of Christ. Then the trees lining the banks of the Jordan were the first to hearken unto the whistle of the wind issuing from the wilderness. And the voice of a hurricane which rose in the wilderness and had also reached the Jordan proclaimed to the world tidings of a new life! It was on the shores of this historical river that John the Baptist first set foot. And Essau, making his way from the wilderness through this river, began a new page in the history of his people.

Centuries passed. By the will of God, events transpired on the banks of the Jordan which spelled the final pages of the Old Testament. The river formed the base of the kingdom of the new life John the Baptist had here founded. Jesus Himself, who was the cornerstone of this kingdom, was christened here, and it was here that He was proclaimed the Son of God and received His baptism in these sacred waters from the hand of John. Inspired by the dedicated spirit of this sanctified stream, Jesus Christ had here prescribed the first pages of the New Testament. Having thus begun His tremendous mission, He returned to the waters of the Jordan, where He would bring it to conclusion, at the same time that He would end His labors. His pupils knew He had ascended to Heaven from a spot near by. But circumstances brought it about so that this was also the place of His rebirth into His new, personal life.

Jesus opened His eyes and looked toward Mary. He saw she was quiet in meditation. Why was she so thoughtful, and of what was she thinking, He inquired fondly.

Mary, hearing Him speak, came to as if from a dream and, going to Him, fell on her knees before Him. She begged His forgiveness, but He could not understand for what.

It developed that she felt guilty because she had not heeded His admonition to stay behind when He had gone to His pupils. She implored Him: "Forgive me, my Rabbi, for having disobeyed Thee! This is the first time I have gone contrary to Thy wishes.



When Thou leftst me, I watched Thee disappear and reappear. I could not calmly remain there, and so followed Thee behind the boulders, until Thou didst reach the shore. I saw Thee speaking with them, and watched Thee going thence with Peter. Then, while Thou talkedst with him, I was ten paces away, concealed so that Thou shouldst not notice me. I saw Peter, too, after Thou hadst spoken with him; he rose and ran to the others. What he was explaining to them I could not tell; they were too far away. I could not leave my hiding place until after Thou hadst walked away. And I saw Thy pupils looking toward the heavens, as if seeking someone there. When Thou hadst gone some distance, I paid no further heed to Thy pupils. I tried to return here before Thee, but could not do so. I ran roundabout so that Thou shouldst not know I had left here. Forgive me, my Rabbi, for having done this, and for not telling Thee of it ere now! While Thou sleptst, I thought on this and was overcome with remorse. I have never concealed aught from Thee before, and never shall again. Now that I have told this to Thee, I feel relieved. Thou shalt grant me forgiveness?"

Awaiting His reply, Mary gazed at Him earnestly.

Jesus knew not what to say. Her story had been unexpected. By way of response, fondly He inclined Mary's head on His chest and began to caress it. He wanted to take time to think of what she had told Him.

He pondered on what she had related of His pupils. They had bent their eyes toward Heaven, as if looking to Him there. Then they had no doubt that He had ascended to His Father! Because she had thus given Him assurance of this, He was ready to grant her more than the mere forgiveness she sought.

The still unresolved question in His mind was Mary's future. Several times He had told her that He was returning to His Heavenly Father, in order to prepare her. But so infatuated with Him was she that she did not seek to penetrate the significance of events surrounding her Rabbi. In its dominance over her, love had beclouded her mind and reason. She was happy to be with

Jesus—nothing else had any meaning. Had things taken such a turn that she would have lost Him again, the picture would be different. She would have sought Him out anew; doubtless, she would have gone to His pupils in order to learn of His whereabouts. And what would they have told her? That He had gone to meet His Father? Such an explanation would be amazing and incredible to Mary, for had she not been with Him after the resurrection, and but recently? While her story, as well, would so impress the pupils that seeds of doubt might be sowed. The results of the resurrection, achieved with such difficulty, would be shattered, if not altogether destroyed.

There was no doubt that Jesus loved Magdalen. But He had loved more the goal to which He and His pupils were consecrated. Now, He no longer existed for His fellow men; His future life was to be cloaked in obscurity. He Himself knew not what it was to be. One thing only was clear. To the end of His days, He must remain for His people the Messiah who had gone to His Heavenly Father. How long this state of affairs would continue, and what unforeseen contingency might confront Him were questions that for Him were also shrouded in mystery. Fanatically absorbed in His ideas, He had been paying little attention to His own personal life. But His future life would not take Him out of Himself any longer. A void would remain which every mortal, at God's bidding, must seek to fill after the fashion of all humans. Now that He had fulfilled His mission, was He to lead an aimless life until its physical end? Did it remain for Him, who had brought about His own resurrection, to live out one empty day after another in this void to the day of His death? What sweetness would life hold for Him, were He to snuff out the divine spark now glowing in Him? He would be no more than a nonentity, able to fill His empty young existence with only remembrance of glory that was now past.

Would He be able to endure such torment, a torment much worse than were His sufferings upon the cross? She, whom even now Jesus was embracing, was one who, blindly and without

wavering, trusted and loved Him. Her life contained only Him. Should He not, as well, dedicate His now empty future life to her . . . ?

Fondling Mary's head, Jesus said in soft, gentle tones: "Aye, Mary, I give thee absolution for thy disobedience, for this was the first time, and thou hast thyself confessed it. Therefore I forgive thee wholeheartedly, and do thou erase it from memory."

The woman, overjoyed, repeatedly kissed His hands, saying: "I will always obey Thee and never do aught in secret from Thee."

At this, Jesus smiled. "So thou givest me thy word that thou wilt do nothing secretly and without my direction?"

"Aye!" she exclaimed. "Upon my life and the love I bear Thee!"

"Mary, I desire thee to pay careful heed to my words, and to try to understand, for it is very important."

She nodded affirmatively, and kneeling before Him gazed at Jesus in anticipation.

He then said: "I have told thee before that upon fulfilling my consecrated duty, I must return to my Father."

Here, she showed uneasiness and wished to speak, but He restrained her by a motion of His hand.

"Be quiet and listen to me. When I have finished, Thou wilt reply if there is aught Thou must say to me. My Father raised me from the grave so that I might carry out His wishes and might then rejoin Him. After my resurrection, I did as He wished. The task laid upon me is finished. I must return to Him. I had known before, and have lately received further confirmation, of thy feeling for me. Could I be sure that this feeling might ever remain the same, it might effect a change in my intention."

In answer to this, and heedless of the gesture with which He again tried to intercept her words, she exclaimed: "My Rabbi, can it be that Thou doubttest me? Have I not told Thee that without Thee I cannot and do not wish, to live? I shall always be Thy servant, only to be with Thee. Thou must believe me, my beloved Rabbi, for there is no one who has a greater love for

Thee! Come what may, all difficulties can be overcome. Only do not leave me; take Thou me with Thee, let me follow Thee even unto death."

Jesus, gazing at her tear-filled eyes, interrupted her. Claspng her closer to Him, he said: "It is well, Mary. Calm thyself. I shall not leave thee alone; thou shalt come with me."

Tears of joy streamed down the woman's face. She joined Him in embrace.

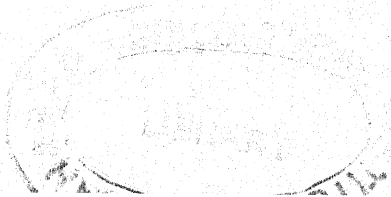
"I shall not go to my Father, Mary. Thou shalt follow me and with no drawback. From this day, forget that I was to rejoin Him who sent me, without thee. I shall go where my heart calls, and thou shalt go with me. Understand one thing: thou must forget all that thou knowest. . . . Thou must forget all my former life, as I have forgotten thine. The least recollection of it may impel me to reconsider returning to Him. Thou must understand this well and bear it in thy thoughts."

Ecstatically, Mary assured Him that all would proceed as He wished.

Noon was approaching. Jesus decided to postpone His departure until evening. He wanted to descend to the shore along which He had so often strolled. Telling Mary this, He advised her to get some sleep. And He, in turn, prepared a bed of leaves for Himself, and lay down to rest.

His eyes were closed but sleep evaded Him. His thoughts returned to days gone by, even back to the day He had crossed this river on His way to India. Gradually, His memories faded, and His even breath indicated that He slept.

And now, Mary, who had been observing Him surreptitiously, closed her eyes and slept, too.





## XXIII

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NIGHT had come. The heavens glowed with a multitude of stars. On the grassy left bank of the Jordan, Jesus and Mary sat resting. They were fatigued, for they had just crossed the river in a small boat. The current had brought them far downstream. They sat and watched the boat returning to the other shore. Its occupant rowed with powerful strokes, but the current carried him out in the direction of the Dead Sea. The far shore they had left was the portal that Jesus closed behind Him on His past. All He had planned to do on leaving the sepulchre had been accomplished and also left behind Him in Palestine. He must now disappear from the land which witnessed His resurrection and ascension. Having crossed to the other bank of the Jordan, Jesus was born anew.

This rebirth gladdened Him, for He felt He had carried out that which had been expected of Him. His joy was the greater in that He was not alone. Mary was with Him, and overwhelmed Him with maternal attention. Silent and uncomplaining, she had followed Him here. Even when they were crossing the Jordan, she evidenced no interest in their destination. She knew that on the opposite shore lay another land, but where she was had no importance for her, so long as she was with Him.

Having rested for some time, they now rose and took their way to the nearest village. They no longer had need of concealment, for no one knew them here. The natives were Arabs whose

country at this time adjoined Palestine. Their life and religion differed from those of the Jews, and they did not concern themselves with another mode of life.

Having found suitable overnight lodgings in one of the peasant huts, the travelers took their ease. At sunset next morning, they continued on their way into the heart of the country. Magdalen, observing Jesus' cheerfulness, was likewise gay. Calmly, they walked on, without hurrying, absorbed in conversation.

At first, they spoke of His wounds which had almost healed. Bit by bit, the discussion centered on their journey. Jesus deliberately led to this subject. Caressing His companion's thick hair, He asked: "Where dost thou suppose we are going?"

"I do not know," she said. "Surely, however, Thou knowest, my Rabbi. I care not, so long as Thou art without care or fear of being arrested."

At these words, the Nazarene laughed. "Do not fear, Mary, for there is no longer any one to molest me. Had I remained in Palestine, I probably could be neither free nor calm. But here—who has any interest in me? My desire is only that my pupils shall not sit by idly, but shall go on to fulfill my instructions."

As past events had shown Magdalen the true worth of Jesus' pupils, she now remarked ironically: "My Rabbi, again, Thou art concerned with Thy pupils. But none of them is worthy of Thee. Forget them!"

This was not the first time Mary had so referred to His disciples. Christ now thought of them all. Looking at the woman gravely, He replied: "Listen, Mary. Thou hast spoken of my pupils in this manner before. Thou art mistaken in thinking that none of them is worthy of me. There may be some who are, of whom Thou hast no knowledge. Why dost thou measure them all with the same rod?"

"Of whom does my Rabbi speak?" Mary interjected.

"Of Judas, for instance."

"Judas!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, of him . . . Were there even one among them like unto him, I would be content and happy."

"I do not understand. Was he not the cause of all Thy suffering? How can he be worthy?" She was indignant.

Jesus looked at Mary. "To be able to judge rightly, one must know and understand all that happened. Thou art not to be blamed for not knowing. It is not even necessary for thee to be informed. Know Thou this: that I loved Judas fully as much as he loved me! But I have fared better than he, for am I not here at thy side? Judas was not only an excellent pupil, but he was also my close friend. He had great will power and did not stop at sacrificing his life by his own hand, so that our ends might be thereby served. Were he alive now, it would be for me, the vacillating one, to be embarrassed before him. But let us not speak longer of the past, for the remembrance of Judas and of the beheaded John gives me great pain. Help me to forget them."

And now poor Mary, who had been perplexed by events past, now became utterly confused. She succeeded only in understanding that her Rabbi did not wish to talk of things that had been. His strange words affected her so that she said to Him imploringly: "Forgive me, my Rabbi, for I did not know that my words would afflict Thee. Thou shalt hear no more of the past from me, and even should Thou ask me, I shall say nothing."

Jesus, pitying Mary's embarrassment and desiring to change the subject, said: "It is well. We shall put it behind us. Tell me . . . dost thou know this country; hast thou been here before?"

"No, never. And Thou?"

"I have been here and know the land well. I was here several times. The first time was many years ago. Far off yonder"—He gestured—"is a small town. A highway for caravans leads from it into the desert. In two or three hours we shall reach it, and there we shall remain until we are fully rested. From that point our trip will be easier, for we shall not travel on foot."

Mary was glad to hear this. Although she had borne the hardships of travel uncomplainingly, she was tired. And now, at His words, her strength seemed renewed, and she walked by the side of Jesus with a firmer step.

## XXIV

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THE River Varmoot, which flowed into the Jordan beneath the level of Lake Tiberias, passed through fertile green meadows. It issued from the distant mountains on the slopes of which lay the city of Edra. The town was on the main road for caravans going from Egypt to Damascus and the Far East, and this thoroughfare linking the West with distant lands was heavily traveled. Almost daily, two camel transports moved along it in opposite directions and at times stopped to rest in this city. Edra abounded in inns and places of shelter.

Late one night, two travelers arrived at a hostelry on the outskirts of town. Their dusty raiment attested to long days of travel afoot. They instructed the owner of the inn to inform them of any caravan going east and then retired.

In the morning, a servant of the inn went to Jesus and Mary. With him he had the leader of a caravan who told Jesus he was bound out of Egypt into Bagdad, and had stopped here to allow his animals to rest. This conversation was brief and the fare was established without delay. Now, the trip Mary had made to her native town bore fruit; for there she obtained the money they could now use for travel. Having made arrangements for their transportation, Jesus and the Magdalen walked out into the streets. They were to leave the next day, and Mary wished to make certain purchases in the bazaars. Jesus had told her they were bound for India.

Although they were unknown in this city, Jesus did not wish to go to the market. He told Mary He would take a walk and would return to the inn where He would await her. They left in different directions, Jesus making His way to a near-by hill. He desired again to view from afar the shores of His native country so beloved by Him.

When He had climbed the hill, He sat down and gazed toward Palestine. In the distance, shrouded in fog, lay the barely discernible hills of the land He had left behind Him. He was familiar with it, but in this weather He could not distinguish one town from another. He well knew that He could not and should not return there. He was leaving those parts forever, in order not to jeopardize the fulfillment of His purpose and that of His pupils. Jesus tried not to think of the past, but it persisted in His mind. Things had not gone as they had expected them to go. They had not been able to create a Messiah about whom all the people would rally. Their conception and the execution of their mission had been clear-cut, but the results were not what they had expected.

Jesus began to probe for the cause of their incomplete success. They had foreseen everything, except a point which had stopped them short of attaining the goal they had dreamed of. John had carried through a tremendous venture. By his preaching to the people, he had prepared the way for Jesus, the promised Messiah. And after His coming, John had still continued his preaching and was of great service to their cause. Although he had baptized Jesus in the Jordan and had proclaimed that He was indeed the heralded Saviour, John had lost sight of one thing: Jesus and Judas also failed to take account of this factor. Their entire program had been based on the Old Testament, and their success would be due to it. But it was the Old Testament that came to be the cause of their falling short of their goal.

By quoting the prophets, they had introduced Jesus to the world as the expected Messiah. Their foes, quoting from the same prophets, were arguing that He was not the Promised One, and as irrefutable evidence of this, cited the Holy Writ. Not that

they contested the words of the prophets, which had been set down at the bidding of Jehovah, for therein it is truly written that the Messiah shall appear. What they refused to admit was that Jesus Christ was that Messiah who had been promised to them. The Holy Writ, these antagonists to the Christ argued, had not foretold when or whence He would appear. "If Jesus the Christ," they told His supporters, "is the genuine Messiah, we should not know wherefrom he has come, whereas we are all informed as to who this man is, where he was born, and we know his family well. Therefore, as his person and background are familiar to us, he cannot be the Promised One. The real Messiah, as augured by the prophets, is still to come! Inasmuch as Jesus is not He, it follows that all that has been foretold in the Holy Writ has no connection with him whatsoever." This was the chief weapon of the enemies of Jesus against Him and His supporters.

More than once, after His resurrection, did Jesus strive to probe to the root of their failure. But heretofore, He had not had sufficient time to analyze this. He had concentrated on saving His life, as well as on salvaging what was left of their unfinished task. And in these efforts He had surely displayed His dominant will. At the risk of His life, he had striven to save the good that had been accomplished, so that it should not disappear with Him. He had tried to instill new faith and vigor in His pupils and followers. Now, the outcome hinged on them, and on whether they would be able to convince the masses that the resurrected Christ was indeed He who had been awaited.

During His life, Jesus had combatted the theories advanced by His opponents. In this He was partially successful, as He knew the history of His people well and was further armed with His knowledge of the philosophy and science of the East. In this, it would be hard to find one among His pupils who could replace Him. Despite the fact that His resurrection from the dead was a mighty sword for His followers, Jesus still could not anticipate the outcome. And so it came about that the only certain safeguard of the success of their venture now appeared to be His disappearance from the scene of His labors. He decided to take

this step. He knew that it was not sufficient for Him to disappear from Palestine temporarily. He must disappear once and for all as the Christ from the sight of man. He must so erase his identity that only the memory of Him would remain. And should He elect to remain to live among mortals, it could be only in the identity of one unknown and unrecognized by other men. His journeyings with Mary evidenced that the latter alternative was the one He had chosen.

Jesus Christ was aware of discontent in Himself in regard to the unfinished work He and His disciples had undertaken. Instead of the Messiah becoming the center of the unification of His people, the opposite had come about. Their dissensions had intensified and their malice toward each other increased. This was vividly demonstrated by the judgment passed on Jesus, and by the persecution of His followers. Now, in a strange land, this unknown traveler, absorbed in His thoughts, had achieved a complete understanding of this. His distress was the greater in that He knew Himself to be the chief cause of His failure. It was not in His strivings that He had erred, but in that He and His pupils had tried to go contrary to the laws of Nature. Every living thing coming into this world with a spark of the Divine by the will of the Almighty, cannot do other than obey His laws. For it is His impeccable laws which attest to His might. Any human thing must be born of its own species, and this was the argument His enemies now brought forward, indicating Jesus' relatives, who were known to all. Great and invaluable were the ideas which had brought together Jesus, Judas, and John, all three in pursuit of a single destiny. The flaw lay in the foundation of this edifice of their dreams. It was going against the laws of Nature, even though their purpose was exalted. The lifeless head of John on its golden platter, the self-hanged body of Judas, and His own exile—a flight from Himself as the proclaimed Messiah—all served to convince Jesus that the laws of the Almighty are not incontrovertible. Had the three friends, who belonged to the Essenites, followed an unswerving course by preaching their exalted ideas as the one true religion, they might have succeeded in inspiring

the masses to become united, and thus would have achieved their goal. Intermingling the thought of Eastern philosophers with the fabulous mythology of their people, they had thought to create a new religion. They had not taken into account the worm of logic and reason which would eat into the fabric of their preachments.

Midday was nearing, as Jesus, mentally fatigued, returned to the caravanserai. Mary awaited Him.

On His arrival, she began showing Him the purchases she had made. He saw that she had forgotten nothing, and He was pleased to see that concern for Him held primary importance in her mind.

Noticing that Jesus was attentively examining the opened parcels, she said: "Forgive me, my Rabbi, that I bought these without learning Thy wishes. I tried to get of the best."

Jesus smiled at her. "One might think that thou hadst made such a journey before. Thou hast anticipated everything."

These words gave Mary much joy. "Were I alone, dear Rabbi, I would not have known what to purchase. I asked the leader of our caravan to advise me. He did so, and this is the result."

Wishing to give her pleasure, Christ drew the Magdalen toward Him. Kissing her on the forehead, He said: "The farther we go, the more convinced I become of Thy sincere love for me. Know that although I but seldom give voice to it, I love thee as well."

Hearing this, she was ecstatic. Kissing Him repeatedly, she said, over and over: "My Rabbi, my dearest Rabbi, what happiness this is for me!"

The morning of their departure came. Mary rose early and soon all was in readiness. As they entered the inn from which the caravan would start, its guide came to them, and said to Jesus: "Rabbi . . . will you ride on the foremost or the hindmost camels?"

In surprise, Jesus and Mary looked at each other. She was about to explain to the guide that "Rabbi" was the name she had





given Him, and that His real name was Jesus, when He took her hand and said to the guide: "On the foremost." Then, turning to Mary, He said quietly: "Be silent, Mary. Let them think that is my name."

The guide, who had overheard Mary addressing Jesus as "Rabbi," took Him to be thus named. He took their things and began to load them on the animals.

Jesus felt glad that in this unexpected manner He had cast off His real name. Now He had been newly christened on this, the eve of His new life.

The camels, conjoined, moved forward now to the sound of tinkling bells. Mary occupied the first camel. The guide, holding the chain about the animal's neck, led the way.

## XXV

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THE days passed monotonously. The caravan was nearing the banks of the Tigris. Shortly, they reached the city of Bagdad, and here, the leader of the caravan told Jesus, they would remain at least two days. Finding suitable lodgings, Jesus and Mary broke their journey.

The towns that they had passed through were already known to Jesus. But Mary, who had left Palestine for the first time, looked about her with interest. Noting this, Jesus informed her as to various things. Sometimes, He related to her from the history of the inhabitants, and this gave Mary much pleasure. Aimlessly, they floated about the town, stopping wherever their fancy took them. Jesus was becoming increasingly attentive to the Magdalen, and this overjoyed her. She, in turn, expressed more and more devotion to Him.

They went unnoticed by the natives. Occasionally, passing men would delight in Mary's beauty, which had flowered from close contact with Jesus. Her black, lustrous eyes were filled with vivacity and ardor. At times, Jesus would notice the glances of the passersby directed at them, and He would be entranced and proud at the pulchritude of this woman who loved Him and belonged to Him.

It was now over a month since they had left their native land. The passing days had taken with them the traces of their former life. The Nazarene made no plans as to their forthcoming life in

India. He was content to have escaped, and was pleased to remain in anonymity. He had personally brought about His resurrection as well as His ascension. He was satisfied in the conviction that this was the only way out for Him. Had He done otherwise, there is no doubt that the work of His hands would have come to nothing. As it was, the good would not be undone and His course was justified. That body was no longer of this world, for it had died on the cross. Let His foes search for it vainly. The longer their search continued, the more meager the results would be, and the better it would serve His ends. His followers had acknowledged the Resurrection, and had witnessed the Ascension with their own eyes. Even if some doubt should assail them, it would avail them nought for Jesus was to be seen and found nowhere. And as the only other witness was Mary, none other could contradict the pupils in what they had seen. Jesus was certain that Mary would make secret of what she had seen and heard, for He had made her understand that she must forget everything connected with Palestine. She had given Him her word, and kept it; nothing was of interest to her except to be with her beloved.

When Jesus recalled all that had taken place since His resurrection, it was clear to Him that He could not have traversed the course He had charted for Himself without Mary's help. Unwittingly, she had helped Him. And should His pupils follow to the end the road He had marked out for them, this, too, could be at least in part credited to the Magdalen. As for Jesus, He would be elated at their success.

Also, He was aware that His feeling for Mary was deepening. Besides the love He bore her, the things she had done for Him had awakened His gratitude. He said nothing of all this to Mary, and perhaps would never say anything. He desired to remain in her eyes what He had been heretofore, a resurrected Messiah. He did not wish to become a mere mortal to her, for He feared for love for Him would be weakened thereby. And now, in the East, having assumed His new identity, Jesus needed Mary more than

ever. During this voluntary exile, which was to last until the end of His days, He was to appear in no wise different from the men about them. This new life was to have not a single link with that He had formerly led. It was a difficult task for Jesus to transform Himself into someone new and to forget His former status in life. This, too, would call for enormous will power on His part.

His only consolation was Mary Magdalen, who had united her life with His. The Nazarene understood well that no matter how victorious His disciples might emerge, He could not reappear and take credit for their work. If it were to be known that He was alive, this would be a mortal blow to His pupils and to the ideas they preached at His bidding.

The day came when they were to leave Bagdad. At sunset, they passed through the gates of the city.

The last town at which the caravan was to pause was the Persian city of Shiraz. When they reached it and had found lodgings, it was late evening. In the morning, Jesus and Mary went to walk about the town. The desert sun and wind burned them. Talking cheerfully, they went about the narrow streets, enjoying the numerous rose bushes which abounded there. The inhabitants, who were called the Fars, looked with interest at this handsome couple whose faces reflected their happiness. Mary expressed a desire to make certain purchases in order to make such changes in their appearance as would render them indistinguishable from the others.

Jesus refused this, telling her: "No, Mary, it would be futile, for when we reach India we shall have to change our garments anew."

"Will we reach India soon, my Rabbi?"

Jesus looked at the woman sympathetically and said: "Thou must be tired of these journeyings. This is the last stop before India. But the trip may last seven or eight days longer."

Mary was wearied of shuttling back and forth on camelback. But she did not wish Him to be troubled, so she answered: "No,

my Rabbi, I am not especially tired. It is that I would like the sooner to reach the destination Thou hast chosen. What it may be does not matter, so long as Thou art with me."

Some time later, she spoke again. "And shall we remain long in that country?"

At this, Jesus laughed, and asked her in turn: "We have not reached India yet, and Thou already thinkest of going on to another country. Dost Thou not wish to remain in India?"

"I have no knowledge of countries, my Rabbi. If only we could remain at peace in India—for, truth to tell, this riding camelback has wearied me exceedingly. But if Thou hast to travel farther still, I shall follow Thee to the ends of the earth."

"Have no fear, Mary," He now answered. "India is my goal. There, we shall stay."

Then, she exclaimed: "Oh, my Rabbi, Thou shalt see what good care I shall take of Thee! Promise that Thou wilt not leave me alone."

Jesus, who had several times spoken to the Magdalen of going on to His Heavenly Father, supposed she was referring to this, when all she meant was that He was not to go abroad in the city without her, in this strange land, with its people foreign to her. Looking at her seriously, He said: "Mary, seest not Thou that I am content when Thou art with me? Why dost Thou ask futile questions? When I had spoken of returning to my Father, had not I also said Thou wouldst go with me? Must I show Thee that I have not forgotten my promise? And Thou, who hast vowed to put all that happened in Palestine behind thee, why dost thou remind me of it anew?"

The woman listened to Him in surprise, and broke in: "Forgive me, my Rabbi, for troubling Thee. All that was far from my mind. All I meant was that Thou shouldst not leave me at home, alone and friendless, when Thou goest out on the streets."

Jesus realized He had misunderstood her, and wishing to make up for it, said: "Thou must know, Mary, that I shall never leave thee by thyself. No matter where I shall be thou shalt re-

main with me. Think no more on this, and do not distress thyself or me."

He had spoken the words which always rejoiced her, but she knew not how to express her feeling. She took His hands in hers and pressed them warmly. "Were we not on the streets, I would kneel and kiss Thy feet, but Thou hast forbidden me to do this in the presence of strangers. It must wait until we are alone."

She continued: "My precious Rabbi, couldst Thou but see into my heart . . ."

Fondly, then, He answered her, telling her to be of peaceful mind. He believed her. He knew, but they would have to discuss this further at home, for here they were attracting attention. "Thou always speakest of thy feelings as if there were need of convincing me. Dost thou think that if I do not mention these matters I am not aware of them? That because I speak not of it, I do not reciprocate thy feeling?"

Mary's eyes, brimming with love, responded to these words of Jesus.

## XXVI

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THE caravan transporting Jesus and Mary at last reached the land of India.

Although the leader of it had informed Jesus they were bound for a leading city, He refused to go further. He was well acquainted with that city, for it contained the university which He had attended and there were numerous acquaintances who might recognize Him. Whether any of His former friends remained was doubtful; in any case, He did not desire to meet them, for they had been present at His leavetaking when he returned to Palestine, and it could be possible that any new arrivals of His countrymen in this city might have spread tidings of what had befallen Him.

Taking leave of the caravan, Jesus and Mary went to the bazaars. They bought what they needed and then took refuge in a small inn. Mary had taken note that during their travel Jesus had spoken with the camel drivers in a tongue unknown to her. And again, when they were making their purchases, He spoke to the merchants in that language. This was the first time the Nazarene displayed His knowledge of the customs of the country; He bought for Himself and Mary appropriate clothing, as well as various small articles. Mary noted with pleasure what care He took in choosing the purchases, all of which constituted large parcels. When she wished to carry these, Jesus objected, saying: "No, Mary. The merchants will deliver them to us. Come."

As they walked slowly back to their hostelry, Mary noticed that in front of it stood a boy. He spoke to Jesus, who answered him. Surprised, Mary watched the boy take their purchases off the back of an ass, and place them before her Rabbi.

The latter, seeing Mary's expression, said to her: "Now, Mary, thou canst take these into our room. Were they not delivered quickly?" Bewildered by all this, she questioned Him: "Tell me, my Rabbi, how could this small boy reach here before us?"

"Very simply," He explained. "We returned along the main streets, biding our time, while this boy took a short cut astride his animal. Besides, thou must know that these local beasts can run like horses!"

These words amused them both. Jesus continued: "In addition, I promised the boy a small bonus if he delivered these quickly, so he had some interest in this."

Some time later, when Jesus and Mary left the inn, they were almost unrecognizable. They wore the garments of the land, which changed their appearance completely. They did not differ from hundreds of passers-by, identically clad. During their passage, Jesus had taken it upon Himself to look after their comfort, for Mary, who knew not these lands nor the language, was helpless. It gave Jesus much pleasure to perform these tasks.

They now chose to remain in this city for several days. After this, finding another caravan which was bound for Matara, Jesus engaged transportation for Himself and His companion.

The city of Matara was in the heart of the country. Jesus knew it to contain a church which preached the religion of Krishna. And when they reached Matara, He told Mary that here they would remain to live.

She was glad that their wearisome shuttling from one inn to another had terminated. Matara was not a large city, but it abounded in green foliage, and this pleased the Magdalen.

This was the city, then, in which the Nazarene shut the door on His former existence. He had chosen it deliberately, to terminate any further need for precautions. He was here as a Rabbi, to continue His life with Mary as a private citizen, indistinguishable from the millions of other inhabitants of India. The more



unobtrusive a life He led here, the more this would benefit the continuing efforts of His proselytizing disciples.

Burning His bridges behind Him, He made it impossible for the world He had left to learn the real truth about Him. Knowing the lay of the land, and being fluently versed in the local dialect, Jesus merged with the population and disappeared from view as a drop of water in the ocean.

Months passed, and years. The Rabbi's life flowed placidly in this environment in which He was born anew, and the uniform years passed into decades. Sometimes, when the Rabbi thought back to His former life, He seemed to regret his regeneration. He recalled His fellow laborers, John and Judas, and how their lives had been sacrificed. He recalled the words of John, who was to take upon himself the bulk of their labors. John had been mistaken—this burden had fallen on Jesus Himself. He would have preferred their glorious end, and He would far rather have died on the cross as the Messiah than to continue to live here in this anonymous and fruitless existence. True, at times Mary aroused His carnal desires, thus leavened the boredom of His days, but could this suffice to fill His life?

It is needless to linger on this part of Jesus' life, for He lives no longer as a man. When Jesus the Messiah shut the door behind Him on His past glory, we were content to leave it so, for in that guise only did He possess for us interest or significance. His way was hard and thorny. The goal which He and His two inspired companions had set for themselves cannot be overestimated; their motives were praiseworthy and courageous. If their aspirations were not fulfilled, the guilt was not theirs. The laws of Nature operate equably in all places and eternally.

The decades passing over the city of Matara left their traces on Jesus of Nazareth. He had confirmation of this, if only in the gray hair which curled to His shoulders. The natives of the town found nothing surprising in the sight, one day, of His close friends who, in respect to their last obligation to the Rabbi, accompanied His body to its final rest. He had come into this world at the will of the Almighty, who had invested Him, as he

had others, with His divine spark. This spark was fanned by Jesus during His lifetime into a flame with which He sought to kindle His people. This flame had been glowing in Him since early childhood. Now, His body had at last bowed to the laws of Nature; it had reached its extinction. In His second existence, Jesus repeated the mistake He and His colleagues John and Judas had made during their association in His first lifetime. He had ascended to His Father only for His pupils and followers, and this only in their vision of Him. But as a living human being, His dissolution must follow the course ordained for all mortals. The land in which He had His rise as the Messiah remains in the world's eyes a living attestation. And this land, from ancient times to this day, voices a futile protest to the Infinite against Nature's laws. Can any historical myths curtain from our sight such Divine accomplishments as the majestic Heavens with their myriads of stars? Neither the voice of one people nor the collected voice of humanity can suppress the Divine voice of our Father. Of all the countless suns, at the will of the Creator, only one shines down at us from the Infinite and warms us with its solicitude. It alone illuminates our mind and soul. Its lifegiving rays know no distinction among mortals—they fall lovingly on the just and the unjust. These same rays have for eons beamed down impartially on all the living and all who have reached their last resting place. As the outgrowth of this truth, a grave in the sands of India holds Him who was Jesus of Nazareth. Wishing to chain down man's thought in its boundless flight, the disseminators of ignorance and savagery sought to snuff out the spark which the Creator implants in every soul. Can a drop of water fill the ocean? Can a man set himself against his Creator? The Almighty is Infinite, without beginning and without end, and He has ordained the laws which are immutable, unerring, constant, and divine.

We must not pay homage to false gods.

Let us be thankful, looking about us and into the boundless heavens, and let us sing praises of the One and Only, who will remain, to the end of time, our God and our Creator.